

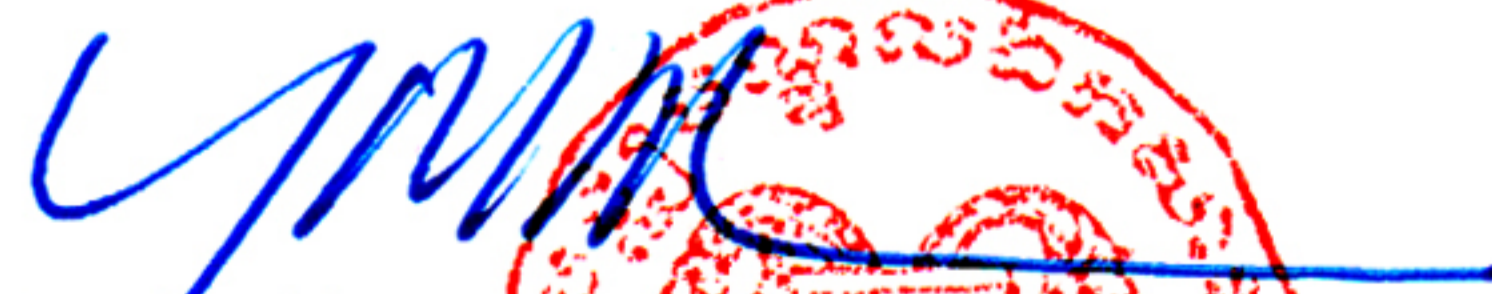
LABOR OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The tragedy of Mao Sok Chan's Death

During recent protests in Phnom Penh, another Cambodian has died while demanding improvement to democracy and human rights in Cambodia. The victim, Mao Sok Chan, was just one of many people who took to the streets to voice their frustration with the results of the recent election. Mao Sok Chan was married and is survived by four children, who will now grow up without their father.

It is tempting to discount the tragedy of Mao Sok Chan's death in light of his country's bitter history of human rights abuses and mass killings over the past half-century, however, it is important that past abuses are not allowed to excuse current and future acts of violence and violations of the basic principle of individual human rights and dignity. Mao Sok Chan, his family and all Cambodians deserve to see justice done for this inexcusable act of violence. Just because millions of people who killed others during the Khmer Rouge period or Cambodia's civil wars escaped prosecution, does not mean that the parties responsible for Mao Sok Chan's death should enjoy impunity for their actions.

Although it is doubtful that Mao Sok Chan himself set out to be a martyr for the cause of democracy in his country, his life has nonetheless been taken from him while he was protesting to demand a better future that he will not live to see. Democracy and human rights are causes that, despite their noble aspirations, have sadly required many lives to be sacrificed in Cambodia and elsewhere before being realized. Now, for the first time in its turbulent history, Cambodia is finally installing its own democratic foundations through the efforts and sacrifices of Mao Sok Chan and other Cambodians like him, who have stood up and demanded that their nation do better. While the ultimate goal of establishing a truly democratic nation that fundamentally respects human rights may remain out of reach for the time being, we should not forget Mao Sok Chan who died for us, now or in the future when the ideals he died for are finally attained.


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