Civil Society Continues to Remember Kem Ley’s Heroism Eight Years After His Murder

Civil society groups and youth activists on Wednesday marked the eighth anniversary of Kem Ley’s murder at the Caltex gas station where he was shot.

On the eighth anniversary of Kem Ley’s murder in 2016, civil society groups and youth activists gathered at the Caltex petrol station near the Bokor traffic lights, where he was shot dead. They laid wreaths, rendered speeches and participated in a Buddhist prayer to commemorate his passing.

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) on Tuesday organized a Buddhist ceremony to pray for his soul and other “heroes who lost their lives in the line of social work”. An hour-long discussion was also included to allow friends of late Kem Ley’s to share their experience and memories of him.

Political analyst Meas Nee, who was a close friend and colleague of Kem Ley, said they knew each other very well as they worked together without political ambition. He said their work was aimed at strengthening the capacity of the media to uphold the truth as the system was “too weak”.

“As we know, if the media belongs to the state, it will only speak for the government, therefore the people will live in a situation that always lacks facts, and ultimately live in a society where we are always lying to each other,” he said.

Nee also mentioned that two to three months before Kem Ley’s death there were “always people following them whenever they met”.

Hang Samphors, a team leader of Cambodian Female Journalists (CFJ), who worked with Kem Ley at the Women’s Media Center of Cambodia back then described him as a “friendly and simple person”.

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“Although it has been eight years, I will not forget that day. Eight years passed in a blink of an eye but justice has not been served and I don’t expect that to happen because as a human being, he was a source for Cambodian society, spreading his message to inspire people to continue to be strong,” she said at the CCHR event.

On Wednesday morning, about 30 monks and youths marched without shoes from Bak Touk High School to the petrol station with banners, one of which read, “Eight years after the doctor was shot, justice must be available for those who dare to tell the truth”. They joined civil society groups to place flowers at the site after an hour’s walk.

One of the youth activists read a letter she wrote to Kem Ley “informing” him that since his demise, “many injustices” have occurred “without end” and have spread everywhere, “haunting” Cambodians.

“The justice system in Cambodia only [served] ‘injustice’ to those who tell the truth, as many environmental and human rights activists have been arrested,” she added.

As part of a young generation which respected martyrdom, sacrifice and courage, she vowed to continue the mission to tell the truth in the interest of the society.

Rendering a high-spirited speech, monk Sam Daro said, “there should be justice for people who dare to speak the truth”, urging “killers to stop their action”. “You can kill a scholar in just four to five seconds, but it takes 50 to 60 years to create one. I hope those killers have mercy and not kill scholars.”
A group of youth activists and monks on Wednesday marched to the Caltex gas station, where Kem Ley was shot dead, on his eighth death anniversary.

NGO rights group Licadho operation director Am Sam Ath mentioned that for eight years, justice has not been fully served even though the alleged shooter, known as Oeuth Ang or “Chuob Samlab”, received a life sentence.

“For eight years, we see that the ‘first case’ was over because it reached the Supreme Court where Oeuth Ang was sentenced to life in prison.”

“But in the ‘second case’, we have not seen an evolution of the process [to find those who may have ordered the shooting] or an outcome, which makes us think that full justice for Dr Kem Ley may be far away,” said Sam Ath.

He believed that there was room for the authorities and the courts to investigate despite the complexity of the case but what was important was the “political determination in pursuing justice”.

Rong Chhun, an advisor of National Power Party, said, “Let the spirit of [Kem Ley’s] eighth [death] anniversary prompt the Cambodian authorities, especially the Ministry of Interior, to expedite the search for the real killers, rather than allow them to be free until now.”

Spokesperson of the Justice Ministry, Chin Malin, told CamboJA News that legal justice for the Kem Ley case has been provided via court procedures in accordance with the constitution and provisions of the laws.

Malin said the justice that was being demanded by the people with regards to “finding the real perpetrator”, might not be granted because it was “not legal”, instead it was a “political justice” which “used Kem Ley as a political tool” to achieve their ambition.

He added that the government was in the “process of researching” other people who might be linked to the murder.

Phnom Penh Municipal Court spokesperson Y Rin could not be reached for comment.
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In an online interview with CCHR on July 5, Bou Rachana, Kem Ley’s wife, said she did not accept the so-called justice rendered to her late husband in the past, calling it “false justice”.

Asked if she expected to see justice accorded to Kem Ley, she said, “I think the light of justice is far away. In Cambodia, justice is dead. There is no justice for innocent people or people who are murdered. Even 100 years from now, there can be no justice for those who perish in the current regime.”

On May 24, 2019, the Supreme Court upheld Phnom Penh Municipal Court’s life imprisonment sentence of Oeuth Ang, dismissing his