

Human rights day celebration plan rejected

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Cambodian human rights groups, unions and civil society organisations gathered to celebrate the International Human Rights Day in 2019. [Heng Chivoan](#)

The Phnom Penh Municipal Hall has rejected a plan by local and international rights organisations to celebrate Human Rights Day with a mass gathering at the capital's Freedom Park due to the recent Covid-19 community transmissions.

City hall spokesman Meth Meas Pheakdey told The Post on December 3 that the proposed event is not appropriate given the country's current situation.

“According to their proposal, there would have been up to 1,500 participants. This is a large number, and it comes at a time when [Covid-19] transmission is recurring. We are at a critical moment now with transmission at the community level.

“The national and local authorities are taking steps to curb the spread among the populace. At this time, we can't permit such a gathering, and we have informed them of this,” Pheakdey said.

Chak Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, said a group of approximately 50 civil society organisations and trade unions from Phnom Penh and the provinces had planned to gather at Freedom Park for a peaceful celebration of Human Rights Day.

Their original plan was to assemble on December 6, but officials requested that the groups postpone due to the current heightened risk of Covid-19 transmissions. In light of these developments, the organisations have agreed to delay their gathering, though this will be the first time since 1993 that the December 10 memorial is not celebrated, Sopheap said.

“The Phnom Penh Municipal Hall currently prohibits gatherings of more than 20 people between November 30 and December 16, and everyone must adhere to this standard, including those wishing to celebrate Human Rights Day. We agree to comply as long as such limitations are necessary to stop the spread of Covid-19,” she said.

She added, however, that the government must continuously update its guidance and Covid-19 mitigation policies so as to balance the right to health with the right to freedom of assembly.

“The government must ensure that Covid-19 is not used as a tool to suppress human rights day celebrations unnecessarily – and that the determination by the municipal hall to permit or refuse assemblies are made objectively and fairly, in line with Cambodia’s international and domestic human rights obligations,” she said.

Meanwhile, the US embassy in Phnom Penh is continuing to celebrate the 70th anniversary of US-Cambodia diplomatic relations, with activities focused on democracy and human rights.

US embassy spokesman Chad Roedemeier said: “For December, as announced at the launch event, we selected democracy and human rights as the monthly theme – representing an important US foreign policy priority, a key aspect of our bilateral relationship, and UN Human Rights Day [which] takes place on December 10.”

“The United States has consistently addressed opportunities to strengthen democracy and human rights in Cambodia and expressed concerns with challenges, urging the government to take meaningful steps to reopen political and civic space,” he added.

Chin Malin, spokesperson for the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, said the gathering to celebrate Human Rights Day and the US’ democracy and human rights topic for December are impertinent to the current situation.

“In my personal view, if the US embassy and local and international rights groups want to promote freedom and rights, particularly in December, they should act in conjunction with the government to prevent the transmission of Covid-19. In so doing, they would already promote rights to life. If rights to life are not protected, we needn’t bother to mention others.

“So, the US embassy and civil society should think again. To gain support from the people, they should work to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the community, rather than organising gatherings which could be risky for greater society,” Malin said.

Political analyst Lao Mong Hay said everyone should focus on the pandemic and unite to combat it. He said the Ministry of Health should double its efforts to apply its measures to combat the outbreak and insist that people strictly follow them.

“Top leaders should set examples by wearing masks and keeping distance from one another. All should learn that no one can be complacent about this disease,” he said, adding that such practices should become daily habits because the virus is an ever-present threat.

Details: https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/human-rights-day-celebration-plan-rejected?fbclid=IwAR29VV9qvDI52_RQ9NTBGs_54rPDalQCUyIWIA1r34LgPjprgBxsXUAxxjQ