Rights Group Begins Independent Bridge Inquiry

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Photo: AP

A Cambodian man compares a photo to those of stampede victims at Preah Kossamak Hospital in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 Nov 2010.

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights has opened an independent investigation into the Nov. 22 bridge stampede that has now claimed the life of 352 people.

A 22-year-old man from Kandal province died of his injuries in Calmette hospital Thursday, raising the death toll of the Diamond Bridge
disaster.

A government committee said it found no fault with authorities or police for the incident, which was sparked by panic on the overcrowded bridge following Water Festival activities. Instead, it blamed the crowd for panicking when people thought the suspension bridge would collapse.

Ou Virak, president of the center, said its investigation “serves as a mechanism for fundamental human rights and justice for all victims.”

The investigation will include interviews with family members of victims, survivors, those injured and still in the hospital and eye witnesses, he said.

Victims have the right “to find out the facts” of the incident, he said.

Thun Saray, president of the rights group Adhoc, said he supported the independent investigation as a way to find justice for the victims.

Families of the dead will receive up to $12,000 in compensation for the incident, with money coming from the government, the developers of Diamond Island and private donations.
Prime Minister Hun Sen said this week that no officials would be fired as a result of the stampede, which saw up to 8,000 people stuck on the bridge. He called it an unforeseeable accident and the worst disaster to strike the country since the Khmer Rouge.

Government spokesman Phay Siphan said the Cambodian Center for Human Rights is free to investigate the incident.

However, he said, “if the investigation has the intention of attacking the government, it is nothing but to make trouble for the government.”

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