The Cambodian Centre for Human Rights is conducting an independent investigation into the causes of last week’s deadly Diamond Island stampede, calling the government’s own investigation inadequate and unlikely to produce meaningful conclusions.

In a statement released yesterday, the CCHR said public comments on the investigation thus far indicated that the government was not looking closely at preparation for the Water Festival and the underlying causes of the disaster.

“Satisfactory answers have not been forthcoming and it seems that the government wants to draw a line in the sand declaring that lessons have been learnt and such events will not be repeated,” the statement said.

Government officials heading up the investigation said on Monday that the stampede had occurred when rumours circulated that the Diamond Gate bridge was swaying dangerously and thousands of panicked festival-goers packed the narrow walkway.

Prime Minister Hun Sen acknowledged that a lack of preparation had contributed to the incident, which claimed the lives of at least 351 people, though he said no officials would be punished. “Our biggest mistake is that we wrongly evaluated the situation,” he said.

“It was a joint mistake which led to the incident.... It was unexpected and [we were] careless.”

CCHR president Ou Virak said preliminary results of his group’s investigation could be released within one month, and that a legal analysis was being conducted to examine possible negligence and liability in relation to the tragedy. CCHR has also set up a fund for victims and their families.

Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphan said CCHR had the right to investigate whatever it wanted, adding that the group’s findings would not affect the government’s work.

“We have our own investigation to find out why and what happened and how it happened there, so the case is closed already,” Phay Siphan said.

The opposition Sam Rainsy Party has also criticised the government investigation, calling for an independent probe of the incident. In a letter to National Assembly President Heng Samrin dated Tuesday, SRP lawmakers Son Chhay, Chea Poch and Long Ry said the investigative committee lacked credibility, given that the only member of the body who is not a ruling party official is Diamond Island developer Pung Khiav Se.

“We want to find out where the police were deployed to ensure security and why the police were not on the scene to ensure the safety of people in the crowds, so we need an independent investigation,” Son Chhay said.