



Reach Sambath, revered journalism mentor, dies May 12, 2011

Reach Sambath, a seasoned reporter, revered journalism mentor and an important public liaison for the Khmer Rouge tribunal, died on Wednesday from an apparent stroke.

Reach Sambath started his career as a reporter for the Agence France-Presse, where he earned the respect of fellow journalists and sources alike throughout the turbulent, violent 1990s.

He advanced his understanding journalism under a scholarship at Columbia University in New York before becoming a journalism instructor at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. There he imparted his years of experience into a new generation of Cambodian reporters, bloggers, filmmakers and other young media professionals.

He then signed on to be a public information officer with the nascent UN-backed tribunal, bridging the court's activities to the public through public forums and other events.

In a country where dates of birth can be a mystery, he was thought to be 47. Reach Sambath leaves behind a wife and three children. His sudden death sent a ripple of sadness through Cambodian and international journalism circles.

At his funeral Thursday, his brother, Sob Reach Samnang, said the two had survived the Khmer Rouge, even as their parents and other family members perished.

“We were together from our youth until now,” he said. “Now that we were in a comfortable life, he died easily.”

“What we regret most extremely is the loss of his personal capacity and full experience in the media field and in publications,” said Kem Gunawadh, director general of TVK, who received training from Reach Sambath.

Tieng Sopheak Vichea, acting director of the media and communications department of Phnom Penh University, called his death a “great loss, a big loss for the human resources of the nation.”

Reach Sambath fell in his office on Tuesday, suffering an apparent stroke from high blood pressure. He was hospitalized at Calmette hospital in Phnom Penh as friends and colleagues begun collecting funds for an evacuation to Bangkok. He died Tuesday night before leaving his home country.

His latest work had included outreach to some 4,000 students in Battambang over the workings of the Khmer Rouge tribunal, and the government and UN roles within it.

“Reach Sambath dedicated himself to serving Cambodian journalists,” said Khieu Kola, a commentator for CTN television. “And in his capacity as the public affairs chief of the [tribunal], he tried mightily to service the national and international journalists, without thinking of night or day, heat or cold.”