

Rights and Freedom

By Attorney Sok Sam Oeun

Before 1993, there were no NGOs in Cambodia. There were some associations but they were not formed like NGOs at present time. After 1993, many NGOs were formed. The Human Rights NGOs are educating the people a lot about human rights, freedom and democracy. However, the understanding of rights and freedom is still limited. I taught many training courses and many students are Human Rights Activists and law-enforcement officers, but they do not know to answer what the differences between rights and freedom and they have never thought that the rights of the people are linked with the obligation of the state. Since before 1975, only government officials could have pension after they had been retired. The old persons received no social welfare. No government provided social welfare to jobless people and old persons. Old persons were depended on their children or relatives. The old persons who are abandoned by their relatives or have no children, many of them are living in pagoda.

Of course, Government also provided some food and materials to the poor, but all of them are through Khmer Red Cross or Disaster Authority. They are only in form of charity and not from the government for social welfare. In Pol Pot time, the people cannot travel out of section or commune's boundaries. They can travel from a commune to another commune only if they have permission from Chief of Village or Commune Chief. It means that the people can do something only if they have permission from Chief of village or commune. We, people living in Pol Pot time, felt that we have no any freedom. We can say that if we do something only if we have permission from someone, we have no freedom at all. So freedoms are conditions where a person can do something without interference from the state and the state has no power to prohibit any exercise of freedom of any persons except any act prohibited by law or abusing freedom of another person. Even though Cambodian people have more freedom than in previous regime, but we still have not enough freedom. Many events, such as organizing the training, workshops or seminars, can be organized only if the organizers asked permission from the local authorities in advance. In fact, there was no law to punish anyone who organized any event without permission from local authorities.

In short, it is better to educate that the state shall have obligation to help the people who are not capable to be survive by themselves. Providing school to the children, hospital to the poor patients, shelters to homeless, jobs to the jobless and social welfare to the jobless people are obligation of the state to fulfill. Landless is also an important issue to be considered by the government. If the people have no land they will not be able to be survived in future and the government shall have duty to help them. Therefore, providing big concession to foreigners or rich people is very important issue to be considered by the government. Any freedom provided and guaranteed by the Constitution must not be cut off by any lower laws made by the state.

If we can do some things only if we have permission, it means we have no freedom to do such thing.

The state has obligation to help the people to enjoy their rights.

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