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Dr. Sovan Tun, Prominent Leader of Cambodian and Buddhist Communities in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia, Dies at 81

Silver Spring, MD — October 9, 2021— Surrounded by his family, Dr. Sovan Tun, revered civic leader in the Asian, Cambodian and Buddhist communities of Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia, passed away peacefully on Saturday, October 9, 2021, at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda. He was 81.

Dr. Tun's long and distinguished professional career included stints at the US Embassy in Tunisia and consulting for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in French-speaking African countries. Later, Dr. Tun worked for the US Department of Agriculture, the US Mint, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Dr. Tun also devoted decades of his life to public service, and he was most known for his efforts to elevate, support and defend the interests of Cambodians and Buddhists within his local communities.

"Anyone who knew Sovan knew him for his kindness and gentle nature," said Sanjana Quasem, from Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI). "He was a tireless advocate for the Cambodian community and worked hard to better the well-being of all people. This is truly a loss for AAHI, the Asian American community, and the community overall."

Born October 5, 1940, in the village Anlong Tradak in the Cambodian province of Battambang, Dr. Tun was an exemplary student throughout his academic career, skipping grades as a young boy, before graduating early with both Khmer and French Baccalaureates. He won a scholarship from the US government to continue his studies, and after earning his bachelor's, he returned to Cambodia in 1966. Dr. Tun was hired by the Ministry of Agriculture, and during this period, he also taught at Prek Leap Agriculture School, the Khmer-English High School, the

University Phnom Penh and the University of Agriculture. By 1971 he had earned a French law degree from the Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Économiques.

At the Ministry of Agriculture, as Director of Planning, Dr. Tun was responsible for the ministry's budget, foreign aid, and the country's agricultural imports and exports. Lon Nol, President of the Khmer Republic, appointed Dr. Tun to Cambodia's National Economic Advisory Council.

In 1972, as the war in Cambodia escalated, Dr. Tun accepted a United Nations ' fellowship to continue his graduate studies in the US. With his wife, he raised his family, while also studying economics at the University of Tennessee and running the iconic Andrew Johnson Hotel in Knoxville, as its general manager. In 1977 he completed his Ph.D. in Economics. After working for several years in Tunis, Tunisia, he moved with his family to Maryland.

In Silver Spring in the 1980's, Dr. Tun assumed a leadership role in the Cambodian, Buddhist and Asian American communities that would last the rest of his life. He began by assisting dozens of family members and other Cambodians to emigrate to the United States in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge's bloody reign of terror. Later, he helped establish the Cambodian Buddhist Temple located in Colesville. Appointed to the Maryland Governor's Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs in 1998, Dr. Tun was also selected that same year to sit on the Asian and Pacific Islander Advisory Group for Maryland's Montgomery County Executive. Dr. Tun was a member of the board of directors for the Interfaith Council (IFC) of Metropolitan Washington.

Dr. Tun's work for Cambodians and Buddhists, as well as the Asian community at large, was not only local and nationally significant, but also internationally recognized. On the Board of Directors of Global Peace Services (GPS) USA, Dr. Tun contributed to worldwide efforts on behalf of the Asian community and Asian Americans, as well as interfaith and intercultural work promoting and protecting Buddhists.

In 2015, Dr. Tun was among Buddhist and Catholic leaders who met personally with Pope Francis for a first-of-its-kind religious summit at the Vatican—the Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue on Suffering, Liberation, and Fraternity. Convened by the pope, the summit addressed relational suffering, building ties between the

two faiths, and identifying collaborative opportunities to work together for social justice.

In addition, Dr. Tun, a lifelong, dedicated Buddhist, served for more than 20 years as President of the Cambodian Buddhist Society, at the Cambodian Buddhist Temple in Silver Spring. Prior to that, he served ten years as its General Secretary. At the time of his death, he was President Emeritus, awarded the title in 2018. Despite his busy schedule, he still found time to teach chanting and lessons on Buddhism to youth at the Temple. He was still highly active in his community until the time of his death.

“Tun Sovan is one of the rare persons we all should respect and pay gratitude to. He has dedicated his knowledge to build humanitarian and social work, and importantly, in Buddhist teachings,” said Venerable Ouk Chan Han, head monk of Vatt Buddhikarama, a Maryland Buddhist monastery. “He has done so much from his heart.”

Dr. Tun was the only son of Mr. Yan Tun and Mrs. Ham Muth Paduma, both deceased. He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Yok-Bean Ngor; and three children: daughter Sophally Tun, and sons Larry Tun and Dr. Sovanrith Tun; sisters Neary Tun, Yun Tun, and Sokon Tun; and four grandchildren: Sabina McCormick, Calix McCormick, Jason Tun, and Justin Tun. He also leaves behind a grateful, but grieving, community of family, friends, and colleagues.

Various services will be held beginning Thursday, October 14, and continuing through Saturday, October 16, at the Cambodian Buddhist Temple in Silver Spring. Flowers can be sent, and donations made in memory of Dr. Sovan Tun, to the Cambodian Temple, 13800 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20904. Additional information can be found at <http://bit.ly/SovanTunMemorial>.