

Blast Death Toll in Dispute

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More than 10 days after grenades tore through a Khmer Nation Party (KNP)-led demonstration, the number of people killed is still in dispute.

The official death toll now stands at 17, though that number may not be final, according to Khieu Kanharith, secretary of state for Information.

"We are investigating it still," Khieu Kanharith said Wednesday.

He said that the ministry's press center had a partial list of the 17 confirmed dead, but the center could not produce the list when contacted Wednesday.

The KNP has claimed that 20 people were killed in the March 30 attack opposite the National Assembly.

KNP officials have released a list of people they say died in the attack. The list, dated April 5, named 11 victims and included an unidentified woman who died at Preah Kossamak Hospital. The list also included five unidentified people who the party says died at the site of the attack and whose bodies have since disappeared.

In a statement accompanying

the list, the KNP also claimed that two men at the protest were killed by bullets, not grenade shrapnel, and that those bodies disappeared from Preah Kosamak Hospital.

"These two victims were probably intentionally killed by armed forces following the four grenade explosions," the statement said.

The statement added that unnamed Kossamak employees reported seeing the men come in with bullet wounds after the grenade attack, but the statement offered no further proof.

When asked about the KNP allegations, Khieu Kanharith said he did not know about any missing bodies or bullet wounds.

One human rights worker who has been trying to compile a definitive list of the victims said she was frustrated.

"We have 12 names," said the rights worker. "[But] I think we'll never know how many people died; some we'll never know their names."

The rights worker added that she believes someone may have "tried to minimize [the death count] and conceal bodies. And they have done a good job. We are thoroughly confused."