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KHMERS KAMPUCHEA-KROM FEDERATION

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**Open Letter to the President of Vietnam – Mr. Tran Dai Quang
Appeal to Return the Sacred Land to the Temple**

Pennsauken, 17 April 2017

Embassy of Vietnam
Att.: Mr. Tran Dai Quang, President of Vietnam
1233 20th St NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mr. President:

Recently, there was disturbing news on the social media regarding a land dispute between a Khmer-Krom temple and local Vietnamese families who built their houses illegally on the Khmer-Krom temple's lands. The Khmer-Krom Buddhist followers in the Mekong Delta anonymously contacted our Internet Radio, Voice of Kampuchea-Krom, to express their concern and to ask for help in appealing to your government to return the sacred land that has been confiscated from the Khmer-Krom temple.

The confiscated land belongs to the Khmer-Krom temple, named "Me Pang", located at the 4th commune, Phong Phu village, Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh province (Ấp 4, Xã Phong Phú, Huyện Cầu Kè, Tỉnh Trà Vinh). The temple was built on this land before 1975 and later moved to a new location where currently the temple is located. Even though the temple is not located on this land, the Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and villagers in this commune have continued to organize Buddhist ceremonies every year on this land.

During 1993 and 1994, there were some Vietnamese families asking the temple if they could temporary build shelters to live on the temple's land. They promised that they would move out when the temple needed the land back. Since the temple did not need to use the land yet they agreed for them to living there temporarily. One of those families is the family of Mr. Phan Van Cua who later secretly bribed the local government to get the land title without the consent of the temple. The temple has been filing complaints with the court of Cau Ke district for almost a decade, but the court keeps denying justice for the temple. The court keeps using tactics saying that the temple does not have the land title to claim ownership. Using same tactic, the other Vietnamese families living on the temple's land now refuses to move out as well.

As indigenous peoples practicing Theravada Buddhism and living on their homeland in the Mekong Delta for thousands of years, our people believe that our temple's land is the sacred land and that no one can take away their temple's land. The Khmer-Krom temples' lands in Mekong Delta have never had a land title. The court of Cau Ke district has been using the tactic to demand the temple land title in order to resolve the dispute. This clearly shows that the court is against the belief of the Khmer-Krom and violates Article 24.2 of Vietnam Constitution: "***The State respects and protects freedom of belief and of religion***".

In this regard, we would like to urge you to help to investigate this issue to find justice for our Khmer-Krom temple. Hopefully, the temple will be able to get back the confiscated lands to organize the ceremony peacefully without disturbing the people living on the temple's land.

Regards,



Venerable TT Dhammo
KKF Director of Religious Affairs

