

Fourteen Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Item 7: Human Rights

(a) Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Joint Statement of Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation

and Khmer Kampuchea Krom Temple

Speaker: Conduct Hang

Madame Chair,

On behalf of the millions of voiceless Khmer-Krom people living in the Mekong Delta, we would like to express our sincere thank you to the Permanent Forum for its great work in promoting the indigenous rights of our brothers and sisters across the globe. The existence of the Permanent Forum means that unrecognized indigenous peoples, like the Khmer Krom, are able to voice their hopes and dare to dream for a better and just world - to determine their own future without fear or discrimination.

While it is encouraging to see the strong economic growth of Vietnam in recent years, the Khmer-Krom people continue to be left behind. Traditionally rice farmers, Khmer-Krom people are now unable to sell their rice crops because of the suspected dramatic drop in the price of rice after the harvest season. Unable to sell their rice, they fall into further debt and forced to sell their land - unable to sustain or control their traditional form of economy. It is more important than ever for the Khmer-Krom to be able to have access to social, economic, and cultural rights guaranteed under Articles 20 and 32 of UNDRIP.

Today marks eight years that Vietnam has signed in support of the adoption of UNDRIP. Disturbingly however, in its recent report to the Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, Vietnam stated that “there were no indigenous peoples in Vietnam.” We ask that the deny stops and recognition starts. We would like to reaffirm our right to self-identity as the Indigenous Khmer-Krom People from the Mekong Delta under Article 2 of UNDRIP.

We would like to suggest the following recommendation to the forum:

- Urge Vietnam to invite the Special Rapporteur, Ms. Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, to meet the Indigenous Peoples, especially our Khmer-Krom in Mekong Delta.
- Urge Vietnam to immediately release two of our spiritual leaders, Venerable Thach Thuol and Venerable Lieu Ny, imprisoned for exercising their right to preserve our culture, language and religion.
- Member States, that have not already recognized their indigenous people, work with the Permanent Forum by having a round table session to set up a timeline to begin recognizing the distinctive legal, political status and the rights of all unrecognized IPs.
- Seek the help of Permanent Forum with UN agencies such UNESCO to work with indigenous organizations to help build capacity building projects on the ground to help increase awareness of UNDRIP through the use of social media such as Facebook and twitter.
- Urge Vietnam to allow the UNDRIP to be freely distributed in Vietnam. In 2009, the United Nations Development Fund for Women provided funding to help translating UNDRIP. But as of today, this important translated document just exists on the Website of the Vietnam National Assembly

(http://www.na.gov.vn/nnsvn/upload/images/Attach/Quy_en_cua_nguoi_thieu_so%20va%20ban%20dia.pdf). Most of the Indigenous Peoples in Vietnam do not know the existence of this important document.

- Urge Vietnam to implement Article 16 of the UNDRIP to allow the Khmer-Krom to freely establish its own independent media without fear and discrimination so that they can promote the important rights enshrined in UNDRIP to their own people.
- Request that Vietnam create human rights training programs not only for its government officials, but open workshops to educate the local indigenous Khmer-Krom people about human rights and their indigenous rights.
- In the implementation of Article 13 of UNDRIP, we ask Vietnam to recognize Khmer as an official language of Vietnam and have both languages on official documents in Mekong Delta.
- In the promotion and protection of our cultural identity, we ask Vietnam to change the names of the Khmer provinces and other historically significant places to its original native names. For example, instead of Tra Vinh, it should be called Preah Trapeang.
- Urge Vietnam to allow Khmer-Krom to form an independent Indigenous Khmer-Krom Association so they can send Khmer-Krom representatives from the Mekong Delta to represent themselves at this conference and other UN mechanisms and allow them to see firsthand the global work of indigenous community to promote UNDRIP.

This year marks the eleventh year that we are at the Permanent Forum. We feel that it is time to stop the denial and that Members States who have not yet recognized their IP do so in true spirit of partnership and reconciliation.

Thank You, Madame Chair