

United Nations Permanent Forum on the Indigenous Issues
Seventh Session
Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation
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Item 4 (c): Health

Speech presented by: Somalin Thach

Madame Chairperson and Distinguished Members:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Khmer Kampuchea-Krom Federation which represents millions of Khmer Krom indigenous people who have been suffering under the secret ethnic cleansing policies of the Communist government of Vietnam. We are the inhabitant of the Mekong River Delta ever since the first century until our homeland was illegally ceded to Vietnam by the French colonial power in Indochina in 1949.

Health care is one of the important aspects of the Hanoi government's tactics to eradicate the Khmer Krom population, for example:

1. There are currently no local health care facilities in towns where the majority of Khmer Krom resides, and usually most clinics and hospitals exist only in the cities, which are often very far away from where the Khmer Krom live.
2. Majority of the Khmer Krom farmers are very poor. They are unable to afford basic health care such as children's vaccination for contagious diseases, prenatal care for pregnant women, and other hygienic practices to ward off diseases. There are no medical personnel to assist in the delivery of babies and many women die in childbirth. Also there is a high incidence of infant mortality rate.
4. The most primitive sanitary conditions do not exist in the villages and rural areas of the Khmer Krom. There is no public water system, sewer system, or plumbing. A river serves the triple purpose of water supply, laundry, and human waste disposal. To make matter worse the rivers have been dammed in such a way as to inhibit their natural flow, making the pollution even worse.
5. The use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers by Vietnamese agribusinesses damages the environment and endangers the health of the Khmer Krom. Also, polluting industries are placed in villages and rural areas further damaging the environment and endangering the health of the Khmer Krom population.
6. Women of child bearing age are bribed with little amount of money to use one of the contraceptives that cause sterility due to infection or no follow up care as part of the population control policy.
7. Worse than that, there are currently over three thousand Khmer Krom farmers, including women and young children who are mysteriously blind. We still don't know what causes this disease and so far there are no assistance from the Vietnamese government in dealing with the lost of their sight. And this mysterious blindness has been spreading from one village to another village in most areas of the Khmer Krom communities in Soc Trang Province.

Here are our recommendation as a solution to the above problems:

1. The establishment of a health clinic in each of the 21 Khmer Krom provinces by the World Health Organization (WHO) or other altruistic organizations.
2. The staffing of these clinics by the World Health Organization or international volunteers such as the Peace Corps of the United States.
3. Local Khmer Krom people get train in health care practices so that they can become self-sufficient.
4. The establishment of a public health service in each village to ensure that all children are vaccinated against contagious diseases and taught hygienic practices to ward off diseases.
5. Each clinic to have a short term inpatient facility for pregnant women for childbirth.
6. Assistance from some charitable organization to help our blind and a study by a scientific team to determine the cause of this new malady afflicting the Khmer Krom.
7. The establishment of scholarship funds for the Khmer Krom students to attend medical schools outside Vietnam, inasmuch as the Khmer Krom are ethnically discriminated against and denied admission to Vietnamese medical schools.
8. The establishment of nursing scholarships funds for the Khmer Krom students in nursing schools outside Vietnam for the same reason.
9. An exploration of the feasibility of establishing an independent nursing and medical school under the auspices of some altruistic organization.
10. A project by international volunteers to help the Khmer Krom establish public water and sewage systems in the provinces.
11. An investigation by an international environmental agency of the agricultural and industrial pollution of the Kampuchea Krom environment.

Madame Chairperson, We hope that the United Nations and the people of the world will recognize and understand the reason for these appalling health condition suffered by the Khmer Krom People, and that this knowledge and understanding will move all people of goodwill to come to the compassionate aid of these suffering and oppressed people especially the elderly, woman, and children of the Mekong Delta.

Lastly, Madame Chairperson, our indigenous children and youth are not the target of aids distributed by international donors. While the U.N bodies agree that most vulnerable people are indigenous and minorities why then are aids, distributions and projects not yet made specifically target to these most vulnerable groups and have regular assessments on their improvements in Vietnam? We feel that our children and youths are being discriminatingly left out of development project and other opportunities by the country and thus as the end of the MDG year come closer, Vietnam will not have affectively tackle the issues and achieve the goals set forth.

Again, I greatly appreciate your consideration and assistance regarding this request. Thank you.