

Fourth Sessions of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

New York, 16-27 May 2005

Item 3(b): Primary Education

Delegation: Khmers-Kampuchea Krom Federation

Speaker: Charlie Thach

Madame Chairperson and All Distinguished Members of the Delegations:

On behalf of the Khmers-Kampuchea Krom Federation, it is an honor to speak on the issue regarding the inequality of primary education that our Khmer Krom children are currently receiving. Before I start with my speech I want to start with a quote from The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, " Education has a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and controlling population growth. Increasingly, education is recognized as one of the best financial investments States can make". Sadly in Vietnam, the Vietnamese Government invest a lot on Vietnamese student's education but not on Khmer Krom student's education. This is becoming one of the major problems that our Khmer Krom children are facing.

Examples include:

1. The Vietnamese Government prohibits public schools from teaching our Khmer language to our Khmer Krom students.
2. Khmer is not recognized as an official language in Kampuchea Krom and there are no books written in Khmer for our children. Any books written in the Khmer language are censored by the Vietnamese Government.
3. Schools are situated in areas largely populated by the Vietnamese people. Khmer Krom student are forced to travel great distances in order to receive their education. This creates a hostile learning environment for our children.

Madame Chairperson, many children and families find these obstacles too significant to overcome. This leads to a high rate education wide spand. I recommend the following solutions to improve the primary educational system:

- 1 The Vietnamese Government needs to invite a Special Rapporteur of Education to investigate the current educational system. Special focus should be in the area of Southern Vietnam where most of our people are suffering from lack of primary education. Agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and World Bank should then implement programs according to the findings.
- 2 The Vietnamese Government should have written laws to allow the Khmer Krom people to be members of the primary education board of directors.
- 3 We ask UNICEF who believes "*Primary education is the most important component of basic education*" to help our children to have Primary Education "*available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable*" by building more schools closer to our indigenous people.
- 4 Billions of dollars in foreign aids goes to the Vietnamese Government on an annual basis. A portion of the monies needs to be invested in helping UNICEF make

education in Vietnam more accessible, "especially to vulnerable groups" such as the Khmer Krom people.

- 5 We ask the Vietnamese Government to allow our Khmer Krom students to learn our culture and language in public schools. We also ask UNESCO who believes in abolishing "discrimination in education" to supervise the curricular activities and make it unbiased.
- 6 Khmer Krom history should be taught to Khmer Krom children in the primary educational system. We ask World Bank to help finance the programs and UNESCO to supervise it.
- 7 We ask the World Bank to help establish and fund libraries and art museum for Khmer Krom children so that we can keep our "identities of our culture".
- 8 The Khmer language needs to be recognized as one of the official languages in Kampuchea Krom. All applications including forms, signs, and legal documents should be written in both Khmer and Vietnamese.

Madame Chairperson by implementing these solutions, the door of opportunities will be open for our Khmer Krom students to explore other areas of employment. Through a better education, means greater understanding of their culture and why it's essential, why it's unique, why it's beautiful, and why it should be cherished. In addition with better education more can stand up for what they believe, for we are here today to only give them opportunity. We can only show them the door and it's still up to them to take the initiative to open that door.

Madame Chairperson, and all distinguish members of the permanent forum we thank you with our deepest gratitude. Thank you!