

Intervention on behalf of the Khmer Krom Federation
Delivered by Vion Thach,

As this is our first time taking the floor at this session and actually our first ever active participation in the historical UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, our daily living conditions illustrate how much we need a human rights mechanism to protect and promote our fundamental freedoms.

We are aware we are here a little late; however, the future for our peoples depends on such institutions as the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples.

There is a consensus among experts that instead of extinction a new era of evolution has emerged. The KKF joins in this consensus.

We believe the UN Human Rights Council establish an appropriate subsidiary body that can fulfill its bold agenda with the broad participation of indigenous peoples such as the Khmer Krom and that can deal with historical abuses and current grave violations of human rights to secure a future free of pain and persecution.

I. Background of the Khmer Kampuchea-Krom

Originating from the Funan Kingdom in the 1st century, "Kampuchea-Krom" has been the homeland of Khmer Krom People. It became French Cochinchina colony in 1867. Later, this homeland has been illegally ceded to Vietnam on June 4, 1949 without the approval of Khmer Krom People.

Kampuchea-Krom is approximately 68,600 square kilometers covered all the fertile lands along the Mekong River Delta and other parts of Vietnam. It is bordering with Cambodia on the North, on the Gulf of Thailand to the west, on the South China Sea to the south, and former Champa territory (the Central Highland) on the Northeast. One of the most important commercial cities of Kampuchea-Krom was Prey Nokor. Vietnam changed its name to Saigon and later on to the Ho-Chi-Minh City after the Communist victory in 1975. There is estimated between 8 to 10 millions Khmer Krom now live in Vietnam and Vietnam and around the world.

Our right to live in dignity depends on the ability of the UN Human Rights Council and the proposed subsidiary organ to offer a platform for us to propose future studies that relate to the challenges we face as indigenous peoples relating to health, development with a human rights framework, use of land according to traditional practices currently being challenged with emerging biotechnology and banned toxics and pesticides of the past especially in our homeland of the Mekong Delta.

We look forward to carry out research activities with experts and to then engage in an active discussion with governments on common aspiration to guarantee the basic human rights of Khmer Krom. One such example would be a report of the Millennium Development Goals and Human Rights in Asia. We would like then to discuss government documents and research emerging from the partnership with experts in the subsidiary body. We believe parallel side events engaged with government might build a genuine partnership in the protection and promotion of human rights.

We believe future standard setting could also focus on important themes to our continued cultural survival in our quest for peace. The role of religious beliefs in conflict resolution mechanisms would be important to our people. We also note that standard setting relating to the right of self-determination in international law relating to indigenous people surviving colonialism and new challenges from corporate globalization and climate change. We are a subsistence people in harmony with nature and believe there is still a great deal necessary in the area of environment and human rights.

In conclusion, we believe we must explore the possibilities of a mechanism that can respond to gross violations of human rights that destroy our community from mass murders of our spiritual monk leaders to brutal beatings to the level of torture by local authorities for the humbly exercising the human rights embraced in the Four Freedoms pursued by all on the planet - Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want and yes, Freedom from Fear.

Thank you for your attention to a first timer that hopes to spend decades in positive cooperation but even more desires to be able to live in peace and not have to defend one's human rights in the international arena except one day as a contributing member of the United Nations to create a culture of peace and human rights in the world.