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Khmer Krom Federation at the Third Session of the United Nations
Permanent Forum on the Indigenous Issues, May 10-21, 2004 in New York
City, USA

Item 4f: Education - Date: May 11, 2004

Speaker: Sophon Son



Mr. Chairman and All Distinguished Members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Indigenous Delegations and Members of Academics and NGOs Communities from around the World.

My name is Sophon Son, Representative of the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation. Today, I am very thankful to the UN and honored to speak and represent the Khmer Krom people.

Khmer Krom is the indigenous people of the Mekong Delta, southern part of Vietnam, the Khmer Krom homeland. The Khmer Krom people are facing many fundamental problems such as the disadvantage in education.

Through out history, our Khmer Krom people have to endure mass of executions, such as Buddhist Leaders killed, temples are destroyed, and assimilation of Khmer Krom culture. Currently, there are about 70% of our population is illiterate and with 90 % cannot read and write their mother tongue language.

On behalf of millions of the Khmer Krom people in our homeland and around the world, I would like to call to your attention to the educational problem facing our unfortunate people today:

Recommendation:

- a. Allow the establishment and operation of an Educational Foundation for Khmer Krom and to allow this organization to accept outside contributions and technical supports without government interference.
- b. Allow the establishment and operation of a Khmer Krom Intellectual's Association with the involvement and support of Khmer Krom abroad to help in Khmer Krom education.

Allow the Khmer language to be one of the official languages in Khmer Krom homeland.

Problem #1:

The educational system in Vietnam today is not suitable for the Khmer Krom people, no centre for Khmer Krom studies or library. The Khmer language program in public school is not able to get Khmer Krom children to read and write their mother language.

Recommendation:

Allow the establishment and operation of a Khmer Krom Buddhist Monks Association without its being controlled by the government and freely exchange knowledge and textbooks with Buddhist monks in Cambodia.

Problem#2:

Khmer Krom monks study at their Pagodas with an obsolete education program. The new books and materials produced in Vietnam have no cultural and scientific values.

Recommendation:

- a. Allow the establishment of schools, which are operated by Khmer Krom in and outside Vietnam.
- b. Improve the quality education in the Khmer Krom homeland and to implement affirmative action when Khmer Krom students cannot attend quality schools in Vietnam.
- c. Improve living conditions for Khmer Krom and opportunity their children to pursue higher education.

Allow outside support to advancement the Khmer Krom education without government's blockage these efforts as political motives.

Problem#3:

The gap of education between the majority people, Vietnamese and the minority people, the Khmer Krom, is large, especially in higher education. There are only 6 Khmer Krom holding Masters Degree and no PhD for an entire population of about 8 millions (according to some international estimates) and 1.3 million (according to Vietnam government data).

Recommendation:

Scholarships and study abroad opportunities should be shared equally among Vietnamese and Khmer students.

Problem#4:

They receive no benefit from scholarships that have generously offered by international governments and organizations due to the repressive policies of the government.

Recommendation:

- a. Allow Khmer Krom to establishment career placement agency.
- b. Create favourable conditions for Khmer Krom medical doctors to be employed and able to operate their own clinics.

Stop bribery as condition for Khmer Krom employment in Vietnam.

Problem#5:

Many Khmer Kroms have undergraduate degrees and medical degree and are unemployed.

Recommendation:

- a. To have UNESCO and PFII oversee and assist the education of the indigenous people.
- b. To have a UN University offer scholarships for graduate and undergraduate degrees for indigenous students around the world where the controlling government has not sufficiently offered indigenous people their educational opportunity.

Problem#6:

There is lacking of capable human resources to live and benefit from modern world and technology as well as capability to manage effectively indigenous affairs.

Mr. Chairman and All Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum:

On behalf of the Khmer Krom in Vietnam, I would like to appeal the UN to take appropriate actions to help improving Khmer Krom education as outlined above. On their behalf, once again please accept our deepest gratitude and appreciation for your time and your attention. Thank you very much.

Sophon Son