

Thursday 17 PM #116

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Item 4(a): Economic and social development
Speaker: Samon Thach

Joint Statement with Montagnard Foundation and the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation

Madame Chair,

Last year, the Vietnam government announced that it has over 54 ethnic groups and that it is up to the ethnic groups to decide who the indigenous peoples are. Since then, no steps have been proposed to start the first process of identifying who are the indigenous peoples of Vietnam. As we have not heard from the government, we can confirm what we have maintained since time immemorial today to the world that we the Khmer Krom and Degar people are indigenous peoples. Now, if only the government can take appropriate actions to protect and respect the human rights of indigenous peoples. This can be done through the immediate adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the governments of Asia, including Vietnam.

We also want to reiterate our proposal for a constructive dialogue on the MDG in Vietnam. We hope Vietnam will host in cooperation with indigenous peoples that have attended the UNPFII for four sessions a series of meetings. We hope the developments from these meetings can lead to the creation of a national mechanism similar to the UNPFII where government and indigenous peoples can sit as equals at the table to create a country of peace, human rights and sustainable development.

Only by taking steps to resolve historical conflicts can a positive and engaging process of collaboration with the United Nations, local Khmer Krom and Degar people, the KKF, the Montagnard Foundation, and the Vietnam government ensure an effective means to implement the MDGs. Without such partnerships, the one way policies of the Vietnam remain discriminatory against the Khmer Krom people.

We would like to propose the following recommendations for the effective implementation of the MDGs:

- That Vietnam recognizes the Khmer Krom people as the indigenous peoples of the Mekong Delta rather than just another ethnic minority group.
- Ask that Vietnam provides a detail summary of specific policies or programs targeting indigenous peoples that are currently taking place or proposed in their Five Year Socio-Economic Development Plan.
- The creation of education campaign in Khmer language about the MDGs as well as international human rights instruments such as CEDAW so IPs can be aware of their fundamental freedoms.
- That the consultation and implementation of such national plans are conducted with indigenous groups and local people to ensure that such programs does not erode their ancestral lands and tradition.
- Request the aid of the World Bank and IMF to allocate specific funds donated to Vietnam to create vocational programs in the local areas where million of the indigenous Khmer Krom people of the Mekong Delta and the Montagnard of the Central Highlands live.

- Ask that Vietnam work in close collaboration in genuine partnership with specialized agencies and KKF and other recognized indigenous organization to start identifying who are the indigenous peoples.
- Ask that victims of the State's failed or disastrous projects including ones result in contaminating land with salt be immediately compensated to provide the basic living essentials and to halt the influx of Khmer Krom people being forced to move to other cities to find employment.
- Ask the assistance of United Nations and other governments to encourage Vietnam to adopt the ILO 169 Convention.
- Request the aid of FOA, ILO and Vietnam to help provide other employment opportunities for the many local Khmer Krom people who are landless or are faced with salt contaminated land.
- Ask that all special inter-agencies to open workshops during the UNPFII to allow for more effective input and feedback from indigenous organizations about policies and programs in their area of particular concern.
- Ask that Vietnam allows independent organizations to be formed to enable further social and cultural development of indigenous peoples.
- Ask that projects to integrate the indigenous peoples into mainstream society be culturally appropriate and sensitive to their distinctive culture without eroding their sense of identity.

While Vietnam has been recognized for its impressive economic growth in recent years, making 138.6 Billion USD in 2005, the rural areas where Khmer Krom people live does have a not proportional share of Vietnam's social and economic progress.

We are particular concern that the MDGs for indigenous peoples will not be met if Vietnam continues to undermine the positive contribution of our work at the Permanent Forum.