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Item 3



Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation at the Third Session
United Nations Permanent Forum on the Indigenous Issues

Item 3: Special Theme-Indigenous Women

Date: May 11, 2004

Speaker: Polly Luu

Mr. Chairman of the Panel and distinguished Members of UN Permanent Forum:

First, I would like to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the UN for giving us this opportunity. For the first time in the world history, the Khmer Krom has the privilege and honor to be at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues with all indigenous brothers and sisters from around the world.

Before I begin to elaborate in depth pertaining to issues faced by many indigenous Khmer Krom women, I would like to introduce you a brief history about Khmer Krom people.

Khmer Krom is one of the largest ethnic groups occupying the Southern Vietnam along Mekong Delta, whose territory was once belonged to Khmer Empire. It was taken over by the Vietnamese Government through a secret and improper transfer to Vietnam in 1949 without the approval of Khmer Krom, the indigenous owner of the land. The majority of Khmer Krom people live in rural areas and followers of Theravada Buddhism.

Today, I take this opportunity to be the voice of millions of indigenous *KK* women, and let their unspoken expression of emotional and physical sufferings be heard. Before presenting the problems, we have some recommendations for the solutions:

1. To have Vietnamese Government enacted Healthcare Bills specifically for Khmer Krom.
2. To establish a health care system for Khmer Krom people with affordable health insurance or universal healthcare.
3. To establish public health facilities available for Khmer Krom women and children in order to promote optimal health level.
4. To request WHO conduct research studies on Khmer Krom health issues.
5. To establish women organizations for Khmer Krom women.

6. To have issues like women trafficking and coercive female sterilization related to Khmer Krom women investigated.

I would like to bring to the UN and the world attention to the general situation of the Khmer Krom along the Mekong Delta. Even after many centuries of human rights violation by Vietnamese totalitarianism society with economic marginalization, political oppression, all methods of ethnocide, and religious persecution, the Khmer Krom are still facing ethnic discrimination.

On behalf of millions of the Khmer Krom People, I would like to present to the United Nations the following problems that Khmer Krom Women experience in their daily lives:

1. Inequality in employment: Lead to the lack of financial resources, and these women are forced to go to the city and work under paid jobs. There were cases where many young innocent women from the countryside were deceived by Vietnamese trader and fell into Women trafficking trap.

2. Inequality in Education: More than 75% of Khmer Krom women are not educated. Living below poverty has forced young women to quit school and take family responsibility in subjecting to domestic chores with no hope of a better future.

3. No role in political world: Women are being treated as second-class citizens. They live in a society where government grants no public opinions. They live in a world where their words have no meaning and have no say in politic; their destiny is judged based on the social stratification of the society.

4. No prenatal care for thousands of Khmer Krom pregnant women. As indigenous pregnant women, their rights to health care systems are limited. In fact, they are what people considered medically neglected. There are no public health centers available for them to go and get prenatal care. Therefore, for the majority of these women, prenatal/antenatal care does not exist. They have no doctors or nurses to perform the initial assessment interview and obtaining obstetric/gynecologic, medical, nutritional and family history.

Only a small percentage of these women are able to afford a one time ultrasound just to determine the gender of their child by paying- out-of-pocket. For the rest of Khmer Krom women especially the low socioeconomic, in the first trimester, they have to diagnose their own

pregnancy. There are no prenatal vitamins to take prophylactic for neurological defects. For these women, there is no ABO blood-typed or antibody screen, especially Anti-Rh factor done to determine the fetal hemolytic disease. No fetal assessment done to determine the fetal size and fetal position, not even biophysical profile to determine the health status of the fetus. For the high-risk mothers, there is no amniocentesis done to diagnose genetic disorders or congenital anomalies or alpha-fetoprotein done to diagnose neural tube defects. When they can not afford to deliver in a hospital or private clinic, they give birth in their home.

It's time for the UN and the world to intervene with the situation of the indigenous people in Vietnam. On their behalf, I would like to appeal to the UN and the world to help pay close attention to the Khmer Krom women issues and take appropriate actions to resolve the suffering and stabilize the situation from getting out of hand. Once again, please accept our deepest gratitude and appreciation.

Thank you for your undivided attention.

Note: Revised on 5/9/04