

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
Seventh Session  
Thursday, April 25, 2008  
Item 4: Economic and Social Development**

**Speaker: Sothy Kien  
Collective Statement by Khmer Kampuchea-Krom Federation  
and the Montagnard Foundation**

Madame Chair,

We would like to say thank you to Vietnam and the other countries for taking the positive step of supporting the 13 September 2007 adoption of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, unlike many of our indigenous Native American and Native Canadian brothers and sisters, our people from Asia are not recognized at all.

We believe unless such recognition occurs, our people will continue to be denied our basic fundamental freedoms as guaranteed under the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. Already our rights are not realized. Future work will become irrelevant at the international level and for each individual Khmer if we are not recognized.

Taking advantage of the recent adoption of the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we would like to request the help the Permanent Forum and governments around the world to help set up an appropriate timeframe for which countries who has not yet recognized its indigenous people to do so. The adoption must not only be superficial but substantive in the daily lives of indigenous peoples.

During Human Rights Council meeting last March, Vietnam announced that it was ready for human rights dialogue. For the last four years, we have affirmed the need of an open dialogue between Vietnam and the KKF on human rights at the Permanent Forum. Let us make a historic moment and start a human rights dialogue here today.

We would to contribute the following recommendation to the Permanent Forum in regards to this item:

- Request the aid of the Permanent Forum to set up an open dialogue between Vietnam and KKF during a session on the Permanent Forum.
- Through such interactions, we can begin to look at ways in which we can initiate the process of recognizing the Khmer Krom people and the Montagnard as indigenous peoples and explore effective mechanisms to ensure that they are included in free and informed decision making processes affecting Khmer communities.
- Ask that Vietnam provides a detailed summary of specific policies or programs targeting Indigenous Peoples that are currently taking place or proposed in their Five Year Socio-Economic Development Plan.

- That a national education campaign is established in Khmer language about the MDGs as well as international human rights instruments such as CEDAW, so our Khmer-Krom people are aware of their basic rights and able to be active participants.
- That the consultation and implementation of such national plans are conducted under the principles of free, prior and informed consent with indigenous groups and local people to ensure that such programs do not destroy the ancestral lands and compromise our traditions
- Request that the aid from the World Bank and IMF to allocate specific funds donated to Vietnam to create vocational programs in the local areas where millions of the indigenous Khmer Krom people who are living in the Mekong Delta.
- Ask that Vietnam work in close collaboration in genuine partnership with specialized agencies and KKF and the Montagnard Foundation to meet mutual objectives.
- Seek a reversal of current trend of urbanization and Vietnamization. KKF ask that victims of the State's failure or disastrous projects that result in contaminating land be immediately compensated to provide the basic living essentials and to halt the influx of Khmer Krom people being forced to move to other provinces to find employment.
- Request the aid of FAO, ILO and Vietnam to help provide employment opportunities for many local Khmer Krom people who are now finding themselves landless as result of land confiscation by corporations and the country of Vietnam.
- Ask that all special inter-agencies be open to workshops in Kampuchea Krom and where our people live in large diaspora around the world to allow for more effective partnership from indigenous organizations about policies and programs taking place in our homelands
- Ask that Vietnam allows independent organizations to be formed to enable further social and cultural development of indigenous peoples.
- Ask for projects that will integrate the indigenous peoples into mainstream society be culturally appropriate and sensitive to their distinctive culture without eroding their sense of identity.
- While Vietnam is recognized as Asia's second fastest growing economy in recent years with GDP annually increasing over 8% and making 138.6 Billion USD in 2005, the rural areas where Khmer Krom people are living, does not have a proportional share of Vietnam's social and economic progress. The KKF remain behind as we are deemed backward by the Vietnam government. We demand to be equal partners for the economic and social development of our homeland.

We are particularly 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.

Thank you Madame Chair