

Fourth Sessions of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
New York City, 16-27 May 2005
Item 4(c): Indigenous Women
Delegation: Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation
Speaker: Sothy Kien

Madame Chair

My name is Sothy Kien. I am honored to be here at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to make the world aware of the injustices of the Khmer Krom women.

Khmer Krom people make up one of the largest indigenous peoples occupying South Vietnam along the Mekong Delta. In 1949, this land that once belonged to the Khmer Empire was unjustly handed over to the Vietnamese Government, along with its inhabitants. Since then, the Khmer Krom have been treated with disrespect with a systematic destruction of our culture, cosmology and collective rights.

Among the people of Khmer Krom, the women face the most hardship. We face a dastardly double discrimination. We are discriminated for simply being a Khmer Krom women living in Vietnamese society. Instead of helping to eliminate this discrimination, the Vietnamese Government has aided and added to the daily discrimination.. The suggested recommendations should be taken by the UN and the Vietnamese Government in order to correct these injustices.

1. We ask the Vietnamese Government to invite the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women to conduct investigations into the discrimination against Khmer Krom women.
2. We recommend the UN to request the aid of World Health Organization in conducting health studies focusing on Khmer Krom women and to implement programs creating greater access to health information and prevention.
3. We ask the Vietnamese Government to establish a suitable and affordable health care system for Khmer Krom women and their children as many cannot afford the high costs of health insurance. We implore the UN Special Rapporteur on Health to visit and measure the progress of policies and practices.
4. We ask the Vietnamese Government meet the MDG 4 on maternal health by creating and funding public health facilities focusing on prenatal care for Khmer Krom women including free check ups and vaccination especially in the provincial regions.
5. We ask the UN to create and implement IFAD-Funded Projects focusing on Khmer Krom Indigenous women.
6. We ask the UNICEF and UNESCO to assist our women to secure public education in MDG 2. Approximately more than 75% of Khmer Krom women are estimated to be uneducated due to their economic status. For example, no Khmer Krom women are in the political arena. They are not treated with the same respect or given the same opportunities as Vietnamese citizens.

7. We ask the UN and its agencies to work in collaboration to create jobs and equal opportunities for Indigenous Khmer Krom women in Viet Nam. Too many are forced into the inner-cities with low paid wages and poor working conditions. Others are forced into female trafficking rings, believing that it was the only option left in a country where women's rights, especially Indigenous women rights are not recognized.
8. On a final note, concerning reproductive rights and personal self-determination, the government dictates that Khmer Krom women are only allowed two children. We demand the revocation or cancellation of this discriminatory legal measures.

Lastly, on behalf of all indigenous people present at this forum, I would like to say to their respective governments that Indigenous peoples are humans too. While some Governments are in denial of their past actions, they have everything to gain by recognizing and accepting their indigenous peoples. As Indigenous peoples, we have nothing but our dignity, honesty and the will to live as a free individual without all the discrimination attached. Thank You.