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**PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES – NYC, 10 – 21 MAY 2004**  
**STATEMENT HUMAN RIGHTS:**  
**BY KOK KSOR, PRESIDENT OF THE MONTAGNARD FOUNDATION**

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The indigenous Montagnards people are one of the oldest indigenous groups in South East Asia. For the last 30 years, the Government of Vietnam has forced our proud people off their ancestral lands condemning us to a life of poverty and human rights abuses.

The 21 January 2003 Human Rights Watch report stated that, "It's been almost two years since demonstrations happened, but the Vietnamese government's crackdown against the Montagnards is as harsh as ever. People are being interrogated, arrested, beaten and jailed – simply because they are Christians or suspected of supporting the popular movement for land rights and religious freedom".

In an attempt to silence our cry for human rights, the Vietnamese government - without any evidence- has even declared to the United Nations that I am a terrorist after I spoke before the 2002 UN Commission on Human Rights. Today, In conference room 1 here at the UN, the Committee on Non-governmental Organizations will discuss those allegations, I urge you to attend also that session.

This persecution against the Montagnards reached a climax this last Easter.

In fact, on April 10, 2004, tens of thousands of indigenous Montagnards conducted peaceful demonstrations inside Vietnam's Central Highlands calling for an end to years of religious persecution and confiscation of ancestral lands.

Vietnamese paramilitary forces however, brutally attacked our people.

On 22 April 2004, Human Rights Watch stated that "Vietnamese security forces appear to have coordinated with armed men in civilian clothing to savagely attack Montagnard protesters at more than a dozen mass demonstrations during Easter weekend".

Human Rights Watch states it had, "received firsthand reports that security forces and men in civilian clothing, armed with metal bars, shovels, clubs with nails attached to them, machetes, and chains, confronted Montagnard protesters at more than a dozen locations leading into Buon Ma Thuot, the capital of Dak Lak province, on the morning of April 10. According to witnesses, the demonstrators were not armed, although some defended themselves when attacked by throwing stones at the police."

Amnesty International fears that the final death toll is considerably higher and has further names of victims which are yet to be corroborated.

Human Rights Watch confirmed 10 killed and Amnesty International confirmed 8 killed. I have recently received information from my people that 276 Montagnards were killed, I intend to make this list public for the Permanent Forum and the system of the United Nations to investigate.

The persecution we suffer includes summary executions, imprisonments, disappearances, coercive sterilizations of our women, electric shock torture, rape and religious persecution. For practicing Christianity our people are imprisoned, tortured and even murdered by the Vietnamese authorities.

On 2 December 2003, Human Rights Watch stated it "has records of 124 Montagnards [...] serving prison terms of up to 13 years for non-violent political activism, organizing Christian gatherings or attempting to seek asylum in Cambodia".

In May 2003 the US International Commission for Religious Freedom stated, "the increased repression of religious freedom has been reportedly sanctioned at the highest levels of the Vietnamese government."

As for our people who manage to flee this persecution to Cambodia, they are hunted down like animals.

This persecution was publicly condemned by UN Special Envoy Peter Leuprecht last December.

In 2004, the U.S. State Department reported that, "Ethnic minority, unregistered Protestant congregations in the Central Highlands and in the northwest provinces continued to suffer severe abuses"

On 13 December 2003, Major Tuan of Dak Doa police cut the throat of one of our Christian brothers named "Nih".

On 15 November 2003 a 17 year old Montagnard Christian named R'ol Jolie was tortured to death whilst in police custody.

The Vietnamese government offered his grieving parents 50 dollars in compensation. The money was refused.

These are stories of just a couple of victims. The Montagnard Foundation has reason to believe that the persecution against our people will end up annulling our indigenous people from South East Asia.

On 22 April 2004, Human Rights Watch reported that "In the months leading up to [Easter] demonstrations, hundreds of paramilitary police from unit 113 of Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security had been conducting widespread "sweeping" operations throughout the Central Highlands to carry out arrests of Dega church. Armed with assault rifles and electric shock batons, paramilitary police squads (canh sat co dong 113, or cong an noi bo) have been systematically tracking down dozens of Montagnards in hiding, focusing in particular on activists who use cell phones to make international calls to report on abuses".

These are precisely the reasons why the latest Easter demonstration occurred.

Let me take special note of the July 2002 where the UN Human Rights Committee, in its 75<sup>th</sup> session, stigmatized the repressive policy of the Vietnamese Government towards the Montagnard people, stating that it was: "concerned at the lack of specific information concerning indigenous peoples, especially the Degar (Montagnard), and about measures taken to ensure that their rights under article 27 to enjoy their cultural traditions, including their religion and language, as well as their agricultural activities, are respected. The State party should take immediate measures to ensure that the rights of members of indigenous communities are respected. Non-governmental organizations and other human rights monitors should be granted access to the central highlands".

On behalf of hundreds of thousands of indigenous Montagnards inside Vietnam I invite the Permanent Forum to include in its final document a specific mention to the worry situation in Vietnam, the UN System needs to know what is happening in the Central Highlands and need to react urgently to the Human Rights abuse that my people is suffering.

Human rights monitors should be immediately granted access to the central highlands as recommended by the Human Rights Committee. Moreover, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteurs and the UNHCR should be permitted to operate freely in Cambodia and Vietnam, and that Cambodia abide by the Refugee Convention.

It is imperative that the causes of the discrimination and violation of fundamental rights suffered by the Montagnard people over the last 30 years are addressed.