

#14 May 12, 2004

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

May 10-21, 2004 in New York City

Item 4e: Culture - Date: May 12-13, 2004

Speaker: Rong Be



Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the United Nations Permanent Forum.

My name is Rong Be. On behalf of the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation, I would like to thank the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for giving the people of Khmer Krom an opportunity to present our cultural issues from Kampuchea Krom. The culture of Khmer Krom was once gloried in Southeast Asia. Today, it is almost unheard of by the world community.

Presently, the Vietnamese government has attempted to manipulate the culture and forced the Khmer Krom to adopt the Vietnamese culture. We have been restricted from wearing our traditional clothes. The government has strictly controlled and dictated the Khmer Krom on how to practice our Buddhist religion.

Mr. Chairman and indigenous, brothers and sisters; before presenting the problems, I would like to recommend the 6 solutions as followed:

Solutions:

1. The Vietnamese government must allow the Khmer Krom to freely practice their cultural traditions.
2. The Vietnamese government must allow and promote a free contact between the Khmer Krom monks and all Buddhists round the world.
3. The Vietnamese government must allow the Khmer language to be taught in public school and use as an official language for the legal documents in the Khmer Krom communities.
4. The Vietnamese government must stop forcing Khmer Krom monks to give up their avocation and allow Khmer Krom fully practice their own religion.
5. The Vietnamese government must spend the monetary gain from the tourism in the Khmer Krom region to preserve of the Khmer Krom culture.
6. The Vietnamese government must distribute foreign aid to help preserve Khmer Krom culture.

Historically, the Vietnamese encroachment and occupation of our homeland has limited the ability for Khmer Krom to preserve and promote our cultural heritage. Therefore, our culture in Vietnam has declined severely. Additionally, inter-marriage has not been a pure social contract, but being exploited as a scheme to achieve cultural assimilation as well as territorial annihilation against the

indigenous Khmer Krom people. Their last names like Thach, Son, Kim, and Kien, which are the most common among the Khmer Krom have been the results of the Vietnamization in mid 1800.

Traditionally, Buddhism has deeply rooted in the Khmer Krom culture. Our ancestors have practiced Buddhist religion for thousands of years. Hinayan Buddhism has shaped the Khmer Krom way of life, guiding the standards of traditional values for men, women and children. Religious institutions are responsible for the education and personality formation of our children. Therefore, approximately 95% of the Khmer Krom are Buddhists. There are about 580 Buddhist temples and more than 10,000 monks throughout Kampuchea Krom.

On behalf of millions of the Khmer Krom people, I would like to recommend for the following solutions:

Problems:

1. Khmer Krom has no right to freely practice their culture and religious belief
2. Khmer Krom Buddhist Monks were forced to disrobe and join the Vietnamese army.
3. Government published books and documents in Khmer language has no cultural and educational values, but purely propaganda
4. Indigenous traditional clothing was not permitted to wear.
5. Khmer Krom's historical museums are not allowed to be built.
6. The reconstructions of damaged historical buildings are not permitted.
7. Khmer Krom historical sites were used as tourist attractions *only* for government gains.
8. The Khmer Krom traditional boat racing festivals are forced to occur more than once a year, when originally Khmer Krom only had it once a year. The reason for these forced festivals is to attract more tourists to provide more profit for the Vietnamese government.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, the Khmer Krom people still continue to suffer as I speak. On their behalf, I would like to appeal to the United Nations to take appropriate actions to help Khmer Krom to fully practice their own cultural ideals as have been identified above.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Rong Be.

KKF Representative

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