

Seventh Session of Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Item 6: Study on the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples in natural disaster risk reduction and prevention and preparedness initiatives

Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation

Speaker: Catherine KIM

Mr. Chairman:

The Khmer-Krom people are the Indigenous Peoples of the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. Having lived on the Mekong Delta region for centuries, our people love harvesting our growing rice fields. We have lived in harmony with our rich land and natural resources. With the current challenges of climate change, we are adapting with our indigenous knowledge. Yet, it requires resources to prepare for disaster risk reduction. It is also important to note the core challenge is that Vietnam armed with no knowledge or respect of the land has over the decades created canals which have destroyed our lands, channeling salt and changing the fundamental landscape of our land.

With the impact of climate change, 20 percent of the rich fertile lands of the Mekong Delta will be submerged if there is a 75 cm rise in sea levels. Not only will rich fertile lands disappear but millions of Khmer-Krom people will be potentially displaced and deeper entrenched in poverty. There must be policies and practices to save the farmlands that provide nutrition and livelihood.

Our homeland is the core of our human rights promotion and protection. Climate change drastically changes our living conditions and our ability to survive in the face of rising seas due to no actions of our own.

We are witnessing an ever increasing impact on our right to health. However, if policy and practices continue we will surely be struggling to exercise our right of self-determination as our homeland will be submerged. How can one inhabit a homeland that is underwater? Where will our people live? How can we leave our lands that our ancestors have inhabited since time immemorial? We request concerted actions. On top of the natural disaster, the path of development by Vietnam since its colonizing of our ancestral lands has damaged the environment as never before. We have a moral, collective duty to restore the natural state of nature in our homeland, Kampuchea-Krom.

On behalf of the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation and the voiceless Khmer-Krom in Vietnam, I would like to suggest the following recommendations to:

- Urge the EMRIP to help initiate a consultation process on climate change between the Khmer-Krom people and Vietnam to ensure indigenous peoples take an active role in policy development and dialogue.
- Request Vietnam to allocate the funding that Vietnam has received to hire the indigenous Khmer-Krom peoples who have experiences in preventing the climate changes to work on the sustainable land management projects to protect the livelihoods such as: planting mangroves and building dykes to control the follow of saltwater to avoid large amount of damages to the farmland, properties and food supplies.

Urge EMRIP to work with FAO and IFAD in their new initiative of the Forum to collaborate creatively to ensure our right to food is recognized and respected. Khmer Krom desire to participate in the FAO and IFAD Forum to represent needs of indigenous peoples in Vietnam related to preventing destruction of food crops during natural disasters and to respond immediately to restore the land.

- Seek the help of UNESCO to create a publication relating to the impacts of climate changes in our own indigenous language as a teaching tool for our Khmer-Krom to learn because they are living on the edge of the rising sea.
- Seek the help of UNICEF help initiate projects which will help to distributing climate change information and awareness, such as: posters, leaflets, magazines, in the Khmer language to the Khmer-Krom, especially the Khmer-Krom children, living in the area near the ocean. Climate education holds the key for prevention and preparation for this terrifying phenomenon.
- Seek the help of UNHABITAT to develop an effective system of providing aid to those who are in need when experiencing losses through the effect of climate change such as floods and typhoons.
- Ask that Vietnam stop demanding that Khmer Krom blindly follow all their rules, regulations and policies without a feedback process or an opportunity for Khmer-Krom farmers to participate in a constructive dialogue on sustainable development.

Since Vietnam has received millions of dollars in combating the impact of the climate changes affecting Mekong Delta, it is time for Vietnam to partner with the indigenous Khmer-Krom peoples who have been living thousand years in Mekong Delta to minimize the impacting of climate changes to the livelihoods of the peoples this area.. We have a lot of indigenous knowledge to contribute for natural disaster risk reduction and prevention and preparedness initiatives in our homeland.

Thank You