

Ninth Session of Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Item 7: The Sustainable Development Goals and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation
Speaker: Son Chum Chuon

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Experts:

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important item. The UN Member States had adopted the seventeen SDGs on September last year to guide global development efforts on poverty eradication, quality education, equality and environmental sustainability until 2030. To ensure that the Indigenous Peoples are not invisible and “leave no one behind”, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Implementation and Monitoring should be guided by Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights.

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 resource that has helped Vietnam become the second largest rice exporter in the world. However, with the onset of climate change causing severe drought and raising salt water, it has threatened the very few means in which our farmers could sustain their way of living. With limited and or no access to help alleviate this immediate suffering, many Khmer-Krom farmers have nowhere to turn except to sell their land or go hungry.

Today, the Khmer-Krom people are not recognized as the Indigenous Peoples living on their ancestral land. They are not allowed to be referred to as “Khmer-Krom” and being labeled as ethnic minority Khmer. The Khmer language is not allowed to use in public documents, such as: forms, applications, in the area where the Khmer-Krom are most populated.

Millions of Khmer-Krom people living in Mekong Delta are not allowed to form an independent association to defend their fundamental rights. Their voices depend on NGOs abroad, such as our organization, to help raise issues. Those brave enough to defend their rights continue face intimidation and prison. For example, Venerable Lieu Ny and Venerable Thach Thuol have been imprisoned since 2013 because they just demanded for teaching the Khmer language and practice the Theravada Buddhism freely in their temple.

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.
- Urge Vietnam to Respect the Khmer-Krom identity and culture. Our people should be allowed to refer to themselves as "Khmer-Krom". The Khmer language should be freely taught and funded in public schools.
- Urge Vietnam to allow member organizations of the Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders Network to freely and safely operating to protect and promote Human Rights in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government should not use its own law to arrest the human rights defender as the case of Venerable Thach Thuol and Venerable Lieu Ny. They were just Buddhist monks practicing non-violent and

compassion. They just speak up for their people's rights to freely practicing their religion and freely learning their language. They have been arrested, defrocked and imprisoned since May 2013.

- 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.

Thank You