

**4th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples
July 14, 2011**

**Kampuchea Khmer Krom Federation
Agenda Item 5 – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples**

Thank you Mr. Chairperson

The Kampuchea Khmer Krom Federation would like to congratulate the newly elected and re-elected Experts, and we thank you for allowing us to speak today at the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples remains the foremost instrument through which Indigenous peoples can stand up for their rights and freedoms. It is also promising that all UN member states have extended their support for it.

Reality, however, has shown that adoption does not always translate into implementation. Despite having adopted the UNDRIP in 2007, indigenous peoples living in Vietnam are still unaware of its existence. Worse still, their rights, as guaranteed by the UNDRIP, are continually being violated on a daily basis – illegal land seizures, unlawful detainment, denial of access to fair and equal legal representation, and religious oppression are becoming increasingly commonplace.

Thus, we the Khmer Krom Federation, seek that measures of accountability be put in place to ensure Vietnam's actions are consistent with their words and with the articles of the UNDRIP.

To that end we respectfully put forth the following recommendations.

1. With particular reference to articles 8, 10, 12, 13, and 40:

We recommend the establishment of a national human rights institution in Vietnam, with collaboration of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions (ICC), to monitor ongoing activities within the country. Through this institution, indigenous peoples can work with the Vietnamese government to better address the needs of their communities. This institution would serve a multitude of purposes such as the dissemination of the UNDRIP in the Khmer language, monitoring and ensuring fair and equal legal representation especially with respect to land seizures and unlawful detainment, and the establishment of Khmer language schools.

In lieu of an official national human rights institution, we request instituting ombudspersons through which successful dispute mediation between indigenous Khmer Krom and the state can be achieved.

2. With particular reference to articles 19, 29, and 32:

We recommend that the funding and resources Vietnam receives for environmental preservation and sustainability, such as those outlined in and related to the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD), be allocated appropriately and with the input of the indigenous peoples of Vietnam. Essential to this is the establishment of free, prior, and informed consent to ensure that ancestral lands and territories are not irreversibly harmed or exploited and indigenous livelihoods are not permanently destroyed.

3. With particular reference to article 21:

In the interest of improving indigenous women's role in decision-making, we recommend that capacity-building seminars and workshops be held in order to educate and prepare indigenous girls and women for the rapidly changing world. Khmer Krom women face massive obstacles in all sectors of Vietnamese society. Institutionalized discrimination and lack of access to schools have left Khmer Krom women deeply entrenched in gender roles with little opportunity to advance in the social and economic ladder. For instance, this year's International Women's Day celebration in Vietnam, which was held on March 8, 2011, was conducted without the participation of Khmer Krom women as Khmer Krom communities were purposely excluded from this celebration. Events like these are an important step in strengthening women's role in society and thus the inclusion of indigenous women is essential.

In conclusion, we would like to reaffirm our support and appreciation of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and we feel the recommendations raised today will lead to a better understanding and implementation of the UNDRIP.

Thank you.