

14th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Item 3: Draft Study and Advice on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child

Organization: Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation

Speaker: Priscilla Kim Ong

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As a Khmer saying goes, Tropang Snong Sraksey, or the bamboo shoots supporting the bamboo, our children are our future. And like most indigenous children of the world, our Khmer-Krom children are being left behind, caught in an endless cycle of poverty, and prevented from fully exercising their right to life, survival, and development.

We agree with the draft study on the Rights of Indigenous Child under the UNDRIP that the right to education is fundamental to exercise like many other rights as expressed in Article 28 of the UNCRC.

We seek the help of EMRIP to help conduct a study focusing on indigenous children to identify the underlying reasons and barriers to why indigenous children in certain regions, such as in Asia, are falling behind and develop solutions to help them get ahead.

We ask that EMRIP work with UN agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF to develop a pilot project curriculum featuring indigenous curriculum for Khmer-Krom children living across the Mekong Delta in our native language of Khmer. That teaching of UNDRIP be embedded in the curriculum to increase their awareness of such rights so it can be exercised and realized.

Reaffirm the right of our children to learn the true history of our lands and people, not just the State's version of history as enshrined in Article 14.2 of the UNDRIP.

Ask that bilingual education be increased and expanded across the provinces where Khmer-Krom children live. Likewise, the teaching of Khmer language at public schools should be made a priority and increased in terms of hours to ensure that it is sufficient for our children to learn and maintain their mother tongue language.

In addition, we affirm the important right of our children to Article 17.1. Many of our Khmer-Krom children have been forced to drop out of school in order to support their families. Some migrate into cities far away from their home, disconnected from their culture, and social support structure and protection. Our Khmer-Krom children, for example, often have to bribe authorities to make fake birth certificates to increase their age so they can get a better paying job in the factories.

In order to protect our children from such exploitations, we need better and more inclusive policies and mechanisms created at the local and national level in consultation with our people through free, prior and informed consent.

As our Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers aptly note: “When we have power over our destiny, our children will flourish”. Only through the right to self-determination and recognition of our indigenous status, can we as IPs of Vietnam, be allowed to form independent educational institutions, associations, labor unions, and NGOs to educate and help empower, and protect the rights of our children.

Thank You