



Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF)
Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Universal Periodic Review: Socialist Republic of Vietnam

***Executive Summary:** The Khmer-Krom, Religious Violations, Land Rights Violations, Right to Equal Education Limited, Women Face Double Discrimination*

1. The Khmer-Krom People

The Khmer-Krom people are the Indigenous Peoples of the Mekong Delta of southern Vietnam (Kampuchea Krom). On the June 4, 1949, Kampuchea Krom was transferred to Vietnam by the French colonial government without the consent of the Indigenous Khmer-Krom Peoples. The land is still inhabited by approximately 8 million Khmer-Krom people who remain deeply attached to their culture, religion, customs, traditions, and ancestral lands.

Living under the control of the Vietnamese Communist (VC) government, the indigenous Khmer-Krom peoples have suffered tremendous human rights violations, confiscation of ancestral lands, and economic and social deprivations. The Indigenous Khmer-Krom peoples are not allowed to learn their own language and history in public schools or to freely practice their Theravada Buddhism without the interference of the VC government.

2. Religious Violations

On April 24, 2005, Ven. Thach Lypho was arrested, defrocked, and incarcerated by the Vietnamese authorities for the illegal possession and circulation of the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation's materials at Komkasan pagoda, Chau Thanh district, Preah Treapang (renamed Tra Vinh) province. He was imprisoned for 3 months and 18 days. During his imprisonment, he was tortured and forced to take suspicious pills. After he was released, his health was in bad condition and he felt unsafe, so he fled to Cambodia. Unfortunately, Cambodia is not a safe place for Khmer-Krom refugees because of the Vietnamese secret agents are everywhere. He then fled to Thailand seeking Refugee Status.

On 8 February, 2007, approximately two hundred Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks in Khleang (renamed

Soc Trang) province marched for religious freedom in response to an increased state of security measures against Khmer spiritual figures. The response of the government was public defrocking in the streets, intimidating monk's families as well as the spiritual leaders, and imprisoning those monks without legal representation or a fair trial.

On 10 May 2007, five defrocked Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks (Venerable Kim Moeun, Ven. Danh Ton, Ven. Thach Thuong, Ven. Ly Hoang, Ven. Ly Suong) faced an injustice court in Khleang province and are currently imprisoned for 2 to 4 years for allegedly



Former Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks stand trial at Vietnam injustice court.

organizing the demonstration.

On 30 June 2007, Venerable Tim Sakhorn, a Khmer -Krom Buddhist monk and also an Abbot of North Phnom-Denh temple in Phnom-Denh village, Karivong District, Takeo province, Cambodia, was deported to Vietnam by the Cambodian government for an alleged crime of undermining the relationship between Vietnam and Cambodia. After the defrocking of Ven. Tim Sakhorn, Cambodia and Vietnamese governments were flip-flopping with the whereabouts of Venerable Tim Sakhorn.

On 1 August 2007, Vietnam admitted that it had arrested Venerable Tim Sakhorn for attempting to enter Vietnam illegally. However, instead of accusing Venerable Tim Sakhorn for the crime of entering the country illegally, Vietnam accused him for the crime of “Sabotaging the unification policy” under Article 87 of Vietnam’s Penal Code.

On 8 November 2007, the Vietnam Court of An Giang Province brought Venerable Tim Sakhorn to the court for a trial after imprisoning him since 30 June 2007. At the trial, no lawyer was assigned to represent Venerable Tim Sakhorn. With no means to defend himself, the Vietnamese judge read the following, “According to the judgment, Ven. Tim Sakhorn must be sentenced to 15 years. Since Tim Sakhorn admitted his crime (without allowing him to defend himself), he will be imprisoned for 1 year.”¹



Venerable Tim Sakhorn stands trial.

On June 28, 2008, Venerable Tim Sakhorn was seen leaving the prison accompanied by Vietnamese authorities. New information has revealed that Venerable Tim Sakhorn is currently living with his uncle under the tight surveillance of two Vietnamese officers monitoring his movement.

According to the verdict by the Vietnam Court on November 8, 2007, Venerable Tim Sakhorn should have been given the option to return to Cambodia to reunite with his family, especially to see his aged and ailing father. This has not happened. It is an example of how Vietnamese laws only work for those who are in power and not for those who are powerless.

3. Land Rights Violations

Vietnam Uses Forces of Violence against the Defenceless Khmer-Krom Farmers

On 9 January 2008, approximately 40 Khmer-Krom farmers in Soc Trang province headed towards “Ban Dan Toc Mien Nui” in Can Tho City and about 200 Khmer-Krom Farmers in An Cu village, Tinh Bien district, An Giang province headed to Long Xuyen city in An Giang province to peacefully demand the return their farmlands.

One of the farmers from Soc Trang province, Mr. Thach Ran, was summoned by Can Tho authorities to the police station for interrogation. Sources revealed that Vietnamese authorities were threatening him to stop demanding his confiscated farmlands. If not, he will disappear from this earth.



Mrs. Neang Ni injured after an electric baton was used to silence her protests.

¹ Khmer Krom activist jailed for political agitation. Forum-Asia. 14 November 2007

< http://www.forum-asia.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1229&Itemid=131>

In An Giang province, at least 20 people were injured when the police used their electric baton to hit the unarmed Khmer-Krom farmers, forcing them to go back to their hometown.

House Burned and Crops Confiscated as Land Issues Become Out of Control

On 30th January 2008, approximately 15 police officers surrounded Mrs. Ly Thi Huong's house and began beating Mr. Ly Suon. He was hospitalised with severe head injuries. The following day, more than 30 police officers returned to Mr. Ly Suon's house and collected their ripe harvest without permission from the family.

In the evening of 24th February 2008, the Vietnamese authorities struck again. At 6pm, Vietnamese authorities armed with guns, knives, big sticks and small petrol tanks set alight Mrs. Ly Thi Huong's house. There were 4 occupants in the house when they deliberately set fire including Mrs. Ly Thi Huong, her mother Thi Kinh Son (born in 1937), her brothers, Mr. Ly Duon (born in 1962) and Mr. Ly Suon. The four escaped the burning house, shocked and burnt to some degree. The authorities proceeded to arrest Mrs. Ly Kim Huong, Mr. Ly Duon and Mr. Ly Suon and placed them in the My Xuyen District jail.²

Vietnam Uses Electric Baton against Khmer Krom Elderly Protestors

Since the Vietnamese New year (7 February 2008) approximately 29 Khmer-Krom farmers have gathered in front of a local authority's building of An Hao village, Tinh Bien district, An Giang province, to peacefully request the return of their farmlands but Vietnamese authorities refused to resolve the issue.³

At 8:00PM, on 26 February 2008 (Asian-Pacific time), the Vietnamese police used electric batons to clout the Khmer-Krom protestors, rendering half a dozen unconscious and proceeded to drag them into the car to send them back to home. According to the Khmer-Krom victims, the police were either from the Tinh Bien district police department or An Giang province.

At least 6 people were injured when the Vietnamese police used their batons to hit the defenceless Khmer-Krom farmers forcing them to go back to their hometown. Amongst the seriously injured were elderly women including: Mrs. Neang Don (55 years old), Mrs. Neang Don (52 years old), Mrs. Neang Ky (60 years old) Mrs. Neang Hung (55 years old), Mrs. Neang Khum (58 years old) and Mrs. Neang Sambath (50 years old).

On 28 February 2008, Radio Free Asia (in the Khmer program) reported that approximately 80 people in An Giang province conducted a peaceful demonstration in front of the local authority building in Chau Lang village to demand the return of their ancestral farmlands. According to the interview of RFA with a Khmer-Krom man who was scared to let RFA know his name, the VC government lied to the Khmer-Krom farmers so many times about returning their farmlands.

² Land issue lead to violence toward a Khmer Krom Family. Khmer Krom Network (Translation from VOA) <http://www.khmerkrom.net/?q=node/1244>

³ Vietnamese Police Uses Electric Baton against Elderly Khmer Krom Women. Khmer Krom Network. 27 February 2008 <http://www.khmerkrom.net/?q=node/1235>

Unfortunately, the VC government stopped them from filing the complaint and threatened them by using the Vietnamese police, armed forces and two tanks to disperse the peaceful demonstration of the unarmed Khmer-Krom farmers.⁴

4. Rights to Equal Education

The current teaching of the Khmer language in public school is not a program that actually gets Khmer Krom children to know their mother language. Some of the public schools just provide two to three hours per week for Khmer Krom students to learn their language. Therefore, most of the Khmer Krom now cannot read nor write their own language.

Khmer is not recognized as an official language in Kampuchea Krom and there are no books written in Khmer for Khmer Krom students to study. All applications including forms, signs and legal documents should be written in both Khmer and Vietnamese.

Khmer Krom students receive no benefit from scholarships that are generously offered by international governments and organizations due to the repressive policies of the Vietnamese government.

The education gap between the majority people (Vietnamese) and the minority people, especially the Khmer-Krom, is large, especially in higher education. There are millions of Khmer Krom in Kampuchea Krom, but very few hold a Master Degree or Ph.D.

Outside efforts to support the Khmer Krom advancement of education is blocked because the government of Vietnam ties these efforts to political motives.

5. Khmer Krom Women Face Double Discrimination

The Khmer-Krom women are also at risk and face double discrimination in Vietnam. They are discriminated first because they are female and second because they are Khmer Krom. Some examples include:

Miss. Dao Hai Ngan, aged 15 was raped by a Vietnamese authority in Can Tho and despite appeals by UNPO and KKF, no acknowledgement or action has been initiated by the Vietnamese authorities; Khmer-Krom women have been prosecuted for looking at human rights materials produced by the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation; Khmer-Krom women have been banned from participating in demonstration.; Lack of job opportunities in the provincial region has led Khmer-Krom girls to travel outside of their region and become victims of human trafficking.

6. Rights to Health Violence

There are approximately 3,000 Khmer-Krom who have been affected by the strange epidemic of blindness with either left eye or right eye, or some cases even both eyes in Vinh Chau district, Khleang (renamed Soc Trang) province. Initial examination has shown some symptoms including cataract, eyes irritation, deformed eyelids, shrinking cornea, and damaged lens.

⁴ Radio Free Asia in Khmer Program. 28 February 2008. <<http://www.rfa.org/khmer/samleng/>>

Cases of this epidemic blindness have been reported throughout Kleang (renamed Soc Trang) province, in particular in My Tu and My Xuyen districts, and in Preah Trapeang (Tra Vinh) province. These blinded individuals require immediate medical attention and also a thorough investigation to determine the root of the disease and prevent further outbreaks. Despite the media attention and the fact that KKF brought the attention to the UNPFII in 2005, the Vietnamese government has not acknowledged this abnormal discovery or has attempted to investigate or to resolve this immense health issue.

7. Recommendations

KKF believes that the Indigenous Khmer-Krom people should not be punished for exercising their fundamental freedoms and human rights. In this regards, KKF urges Vietnam authorities:

To obey its own national law by removing the Vietnamese officers who have been employed to intimidate and monitor Venerable Tim Sakhorn 24 hours a day, seven days a week and return Venerable Tim Sakhorn to Cambodia without conditions;

To release the five defrocked Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks unconditionally;

To allow Indigenous Khmer-Krom Peoples freely exercise their rights by allowing them to form an independent Theravada religious organization without the interference of the VC government, as stated in Article 12 of the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples;

To respect the human rights of the Khmer-Krom people, especially the right to own their ancestral lands, as stated in Article 26 of the Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples;

To allow Khmer-Krom to freely study their language and history that is independently programmed by the Indigenous Khmer-Krom without the interference from the government in public schools.

To allow Khmer-Krom students to receive scholarships to pursue higher education abroad;

To allow Khmer-Krom to freely organize their own association, especially the Human Rights organization to monitor the Khmer-Krom Human Rights violations in Vietnam;

To stop using violence against the Khmer-Krom women and to provide training for Khmer-Krom women so that they will have the basic skills to look for jobs and avoid becoming victims of human trafficking.

To begin a results-based dialogue, without preconditions, directly with the KKF to address the legitimate grievances of the Khmer-Krom people and provide long-term solutions that respect the human rights and dignity of every Khmer-Krom.