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United Nations
Human Rights Council
Forum on Minority Issues
Guaranteeing the rights of minority women
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Madam Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Office of Champa is a non-governmental organization whose aim is to defend the interests of the Cham ethnic minority and to preserve their distinct identity.

Viet Nam has 54 ethnic groups, including the Cham. The Cham are descendants of the ancient kingdom of Champa, whose temples still stand throughout central and south Viet Nam, recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage. The Cham have been in present-day Viet Nam for at least 2,000 years. Today, they number about 130,000 people in Viet Nam. The Cham are matrilineal, which means that the women inherit property and run the affairs of the family.

In central Viet Nam, the Cham community survives by agriculture. Land ownership is vital to their survival and to the maintenance of the cultural well being of the community.

The Cham culture is becoming endangered due to the economic policies of the government, whose aim is to abolish the traditional right of inheritance for Cham minority women.

The International Office of Champa exercises its mission in this Forum by giving the following recommendations to protect the Cham minority women in Central Viet Nam:

1. We ask the Vietnamese government consider a fair and just compensation for the private land owned by the ethnic Cham. This land has been nationalized after 1975. Yet this land rightly belongs to the matrilineal Cham.
2. Before 1975, the Cham minority benefited from an affirmative action policy allowing their integration into larger society. We ask the Vietnamese government to reinstate this affirmative action policy, especially for the Cham women, so that they can eliminate hardship and disease in order to improve their economic situation.
3. We ask the Vietnamese government to help protect the degradation of places of worship, as well as the ancestral burial places currently threatened by looting and vandalism.
4. As a developing country, Viet Nam has implemented a policy to eradicate poverty. As a result of fast economic growth, poverty has been decreasing in the country. However, the Cham minority remains far below the poverty line. They lag behind in living standards, with less access to education, employment, utilities, and health care, showing a clear disadvantage compared with the ethnic majority.

We are asking the Vietnamese government to consider the issues of minority poverty to be the national priority, since minorities are the most disadvantaged groups in Viet Nam.

We appreciate this opportunity to be here today, where we are all gathered to advance the status of minority women around the world.

Thank you, Madam Chair.