

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 17th Session

Item 3: Study and advice on Constitutions, laws, legislation, policies, judicial decisions, and other mechanisms through which States have taken measures to achieve the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with Article 38 of the Declaration

Speaker: Emily Thanh Hang

Distinguished Chair and Delegates,

It is my honor and privilege to speak in representing the indigenous Khmer-Krom peoples of Kampuchea-Krom. Unfortunately, Vietnam stands guilty of denying us the right to recognition. It is hypocritical of them considering that Vietnam is a signatory of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As mandated in Article 38, “consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples” is highlighted as an important step towards ensuring the rights of Indigenous peoples.

The actions taken to recognize our rights as Indigenous peoples remain absent. Instead, we are forced into assimilationist practices and subjected to cultural and traditional erasure. Our ancestral lands are seized, our Khmer language is trivialized from educational institutions, and our religious practices in Theravada Buddhism are met with fear and discrimination. In fact, for merely sharing and distributing the UNDRIP, Khmer youth are imprisoned with excessive harsh sentences. we call for their immediate release.

In recent events, there have been arrests made and sentenced to imprisonment of Khmer-Krom activists who have been educating and spreading awareness about the UNDRIP and the rights it holds for our community. Any of our efforts made to defend our indigenous identity is met with persecution and alienation from any legislative matters. These actions taken by Vietnam are neither consultative nor cooperative measures which uphold the UNDRIP.

We are not asking for special privileges, but for our innate right as indigenous peoples: the fundamental right to exist, to speak our language, to freely practice our religion and to preserve our cultural heritage.

We implore the EMRIP to urge Vietnam to:

1. Recognize the Khmer-Krom as the indigenous people of Kampuchea-Krom. This fundamental step paves the way for any meaningful progress.

2. Implement the UNDRIP in good faith. This includes enacting clear legislation protecting our land rights, promoting our language in education, and fostering religious freedom for the Khmer-Krom.
3. Release the unjustly imprisoned Khmer-Krom activists. They are not criminals; they are defenders of their indigenous rights.

Thank you