



Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation
ASIA – AUSTRALIA – EUROPE – NORTH AMERICA
A MEMBER OF UNPO & IDBF
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Nguyen Dinh Thang, PhD
Executive Director
BPSOS (Boat People SOS)
6066 Leesburg Pike, Suite 100
Fall Church, VA 22041

Dear Nguyen Dinh Thang, PhD:

On behalf of the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF), I would like to bring to your attention regarding to the Human Rights abuses for the unfortunate Khmer-Krom people living in (Southern Vietnam), are facing. Their fundamental rights are violated, because of their own safety, they fear to speak up to defend for their rights.

Background

The KKF has brought the Khmer-Krom Human Rights violations to the United Nations in New York and Geneva and provided possible recommendations to the Vietnamese government. Unfortunately, even at the United Nation level, the Vietnamese government still denies to have an open dialog with the KKF. It obviously shows that the voiceless Khmer-Krom people do not have the fundamental rights to live on their ancestral land as briefly below:

Right to Represent and Defend in front of the Vietnamese Legal System

The Khmer-Krom people are living in FEAR on their ancestral homeland in South Vietnam. When the Khmer-Krom people are facing the legal justice system, they have no rights in the legal system in Vietnam:

Right to Own Land

When the Khmer-Krom people have a peaceful demonstration to return their lands the Vietnamese government arrests, intimates, and imprison the Khmer-Krom victims they have no right to file complaints to seek justice in Vietnam. When they stand up for their rights, they face imprisonment:

On April 22, 2010, **Mrs. Tran Thi Chau** was arrested and later sentenced by the Court of Tra Vinh for two and half years in prison. Mrs. Tran Thi Chau had a land-grab dispute with the local authorities at the Nhi Truong market in Nhi Truong village, Cau Ngang district, Tra Vinh province.

On March 31, 2011, **Mr. Chau Hen** was sentenced for two years in prison by the Court of Tri Ton district, An Giang province. Mr. Chau Hen had organized peaceful demonstrations to demand the return of confiscated Khmer-Krom farmlands in the Tri Ton district in 2007 and 2008. Because he led the demonstrations, he was accused of public disturbance and suffered unjust imprisonment.

Mr. Huynh Ba, a Khmer-Krom land rights activist, led the Khmer-Krom farmers from Soc Trang province to demand returning their confiscated farmlands many time at the ethnic minority agency in Can Tho province. The ethnic minority agency has no power to resolve any issue and threatens the Khmer-Krom farmers to go back to their village or face arrest. Because Mr. Huynh Ba was the leader, he was arrested on May 30, 2009 and released on February 2011

without a free and fair trial. He had no lawyer or right to defend in front of the Vietnamese court. As of today, the confiscated farmlands of the Khmer-Krom farmers have not yet been returned. The Khmer-Krom farmers have nowhere to turn to for justice.

Right to Freely Practice Theravada Buddhism

Prior to April 30, 1975, the Khmer-Krom people had their own Buddhist Associations without interference from the government. When the Vietnamese communists took over their homeland, the Vietnamese government dispersed the Khmer-Krom Theravada Buddhist Associations and forced Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks to join the Patriotic United Buddhist Association (Hội Đoàn Kết Sư Sãi Yêu Nước) under the umbrella of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS - Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam). The VBS is under the control of the Vietnam Fatherland Front Central Committee (FFCC - Mặt Trận Tổ Quốc Việt Nam) which is a committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP).

There are more than five hundred Khmer-Krom Buddhist temples and more than ten thousand Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks in Kampuchea-Krom. The Khmer-Krom people do not have an Independent Khmer-Krom Theravada Buddhist Association that is free from interference from the Vietnamese government. When the Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks peacefully stand up for their rights, they are accused of “Disturbing the Vietnamese Society” under Article 87 or “Involving with Anti-Vietnamese Government Activities” under Article 88 of Vietnam’s Penal Code.

Mr. Thach Sophon, a former Khmer-Krom Buddhist monk, defrocked on July 22, 2010, was arrested by the Vietnamese government on July 29, 2010, for the alleged crimes of sending Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks to study abroad without permission from the Vietnamese government, and for accessing “restricted information” via satellite to listen to the world news (Khmer-Krom news from abroad). He was released on September 27, 2010 and then remained under house-arrest for another nine months.

On December 11, 2011, Vietnamese authorities ordered a Khmer-Krom Buddhist monk, named Thach Houl, who is a member of the Congress of Vietnam and also the vice-president of the Patriotic United Buddhist Association of Soc Trang province, to defrock Venerable Ly Sol for allegedly trying to rape an elderly woman as old as his own grandmother at Tra Set temple in Tra Set commune, Vinh Hai village, Vinh Chau district, Soc Trang province, despite statements of the contrary of the Abbot and other Buddhist monks at Tra Set temple. Vietnamese authorities persecute the Buddhist monks at Tra Set temple because they will not agree to join the Patriotic United Buddhist Association. This is also the temple where Venerable Kim Moul used to stay before he was arrested in 2007.

The Khmer-Krom monk students in the Pali school in Soc Trang province are being monitored heavily. They must report wherever they go. They are not allowed going for almsing, even though it is one of the ways that the Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks practice Theravada Buddhism. The Vietnamese government is scared that, when going for almsing, the Khmer-Krom monk students will have a chance to make contact with the Khmer-Krom Buddhist followers and talk about religious freedom. Moreover, all the foreigners who come to this school are monitored heavily. In September 2010, a Buddhist delegation from Thailand was not allowed to visit this school.

Right to Freedom of Expression, Press and Information

All the media in Vietnam is controlled by the government to propagate the state’s policies. There is no independent newspaper, magazine or television. The Vietnamese government even blocks the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation Website (<http://www.khmerkrom.org> or <http://www.khmerkrom.net>) in Vietnam.

Since the Khmer-Krom Buddhist monk students of a Pali school in Khleang (Soc Trang) province organized a peaceful protest to demand for their rights to practice their Theravada Buddhism in 2007, the Khmer-Krom students are not allowed to talk to the foreigners because the government scared the foreigners who represent for the foreign Embassies in Vietnam or foreign reporters come to find out the truth about the living situation of the Khmer-Krom Buddhist monk students.

The Khmer-Krom people are living in POVERTY and FEAR. They mentality believe that they are just the second citizen in Vietnam. Whatever they demand, it would never be heard and might cause them to be imprisoned for just standing up for their fundamental rights.

In this regards, I would like to ask for your assistance to urge Vietnam to:

- Allow the Khmer-Krom to have basic freedoms so they are not living in fear. They should be allowed to freely defend themselves in front of the Vietnamese judicial system. The Vietnamese government should stop accusing Khmer-Krom people of “disturbing the Vietnamese society” using Article 87 of Vietnam’s Penal Code to imprison them whenever they stand up for their fundamental rights.
- Ratify the Convention Against Torture so Vietnamese police do not use torture against prisoners. We urge Vietnam to release Mr. Chau Hen and Mrs. Tran Thi Chau without conditions.
- Provide a political environment to allow the people in Vietnam to freely exercise their rights to vote for the people and party that they want without interference from the government.
- Allow Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks to create an independent religious organization free from interference from the government. Allow Khmer-Krom to freely practice their Theravada Buddhism. They should not have to ask for permission to practice or even just to organize a simple Buddhist ritual. Remind Vietnam that religious freedom is a right, not a privilege granted by government.
- Allow Khmer-Krom to have freedom of press, freedom of expression, and freedom of belief. Also allow the freedom to organize the associations that are already stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (and even in Vietnam’s constitution).
- Establish an Independent International Human Rights Institution that would work with the State party. Through this institution, the Indigenous Peoples, especially the Khmer-Krom, would be able to address their concerns and needs. The institution would also serve as an ideal place for the wide dissemination of the steps that have been taken to ensure de jure and de facto equality of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the further steps that are required.
- Place Vietnam back on the 'Country of Particular Concern' watch list for committing ongoing religious persecution.

Yours sincerely,

Hoang Duong
Public Relations