

Statement on the UPR Pre-session on the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Khmer Krom People Rights
13-16 February, 2024
By: **SON Chum Chuon**

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of Khmer Kampuchea Krom for Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA) and other 6 Khmer Krom NGOs based in Cambodia working in the field of Khmer Krom Rights in Vietnam.

We were developed by a group of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom NGOs working with Khmer Krom people Rights in Vietnam, which held five consultation meetings in Phnom Penh in March, April, May, July and finally in August, 2023 and interviewed with Khmer Krom victims, human rights activists and relevant stakeholders to gather firsthand credible evidence to showcase the issues that Khmer Krom people in Vietnam face. Secondary data stems from scholarly reports and first, second and third UPR recommendations to Vietnam.

We address focuses on the **rights of cultural, belief and religion, the rights to education and the rights to access information and freedom of expression.**

ISSUE I: The Rights of Cultural, Belief and Religion

Khmer Krom are Khmer people who originated in the territory of Kampuchea Krom currently located in the South Vietnam. There are more than **8,240,000 Khmer Krom as of 1999 and about over 10 millions as of now**. In addition, there are currently **462 Khmer Buddhist pagodasⁱ**, and **nearly 10.000 Khmer Krom Buddhist monks as of 2022 in Vietnam and including more than 200,000 Khmer Buddhist monks around the world where Khmer Krom Buddhists liveⁱⁱ**.

Nepal and India recommended for Vietnamese government to continue its efforts to preserve the languages and culture of ethnic minorities. **The Philippines** recommended to further increase the use of ethnic languages in schools and the mass media.

The United States recommended in accordance with article 70 of the Constitution, the Government of Vietnam speed the process for the local registration of religious organizations as mandated under the framework on religion and allow for an equitable resolution of property disputes as required under the Constitution and the Prime Minister's decree on religious property, and recognize the United Buddhist Church of Viet Nam and allow it to function independently of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha.

There is preserving the Khmer Krom language and their culture but that is only in the Buddhist temples. However, the preserving is conduct by Khmer Krom Buddhism themselves. Some culture is mixed with the Vietnamese culture (Not original Khmer culture). There is only a few of Khmer language curriculum include into the public schools but there is not allowed to speak Khmer language in public schools.

The Vietnamese government still restricts religious practice through legislation, registration requirements, harassment, and surveillance. Example the case happened at Vinh Long (Long Hor) province (see the detail report). Religious ceremonies are required to gain approval from and inform with the local authorities as well as operate under government-controlled management boards.

Therefore, we recommended that the Vietnamese government to;

Promote and respect the rights of Khmer-Krom people about their religious beliefs, religious worship, self-administration of religious affairs. The rights of members of a religious minority to profess or practice their own religion with other members of their group including the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Implementation in accordance with ICCPCR, UDHR, The Vietnam Constitution 2013 states “Freedom of religion.” The Article 3 and Article 6 of the Decision No. 82/2010 / NĐ-CP of Vietnam and the Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

ISSUE II: Right to Education

Morocco recommended for Vietnamese government to take supplementary measures to support access of minority children to education by helping them maintain and develop their traditions and languages. South Sudan recommended for Vietnamese government to take more adequate measures to provide education to ethnic minorities and the Islamic Republic of Iran recommended for Vietnamese government to improve its efforts on educational reform towards a comprehensive education policy with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, including children, person with disabilities and minorities.

However, Khmer Krom language is still not officially used. Khmer Krom children must study in Vietnamese language schools and speak Vietnamese in Vietnamese public schools. If they want to learn the Khmer alphabet, they have to study at the Buddhist pagodas. Despite the system of Buddhist education organized by the Khmer Theravada Buddhist Monks Association, the Vietnamese government did not recognize it universally. The study of Khmer history and geography is not allowed to study, otherwise it will face all legal consequences. All the study curriculums must be inspected and approved by the Vietnamese authorities, otherwise it is strictly prohibited.

Considering about situation, we recommended that Vietnamese government to;

Ensure to establish the curriculum in the field of culture, civilization, Khmer traditions and customs for the Khmer Krom people available in public schools and in Buddhist monasteries in accordance with article 11 of UNDRIP.

Implement according to the Decision on Vietnamese Ethnic Cooperation in accordance with the Government Organization Law and in accordance with Article 5, Article 7 and Article 10 of the Vietnamese Education Law and Decree No. 24/2014 / TT-BGDĐT. Article 13 states “Development and preservation of the culture, traditions, language and literature of ethnic minorities.” and in accordance with Article 5, Article 7 and Article 10 of the Vietnamese Education Law and Circular No. 24/2014 / TT-BGDĐT.

ISSUE III: Right to Access Information and Freedom of Expression

Argentina recommended for Vietnamese government to take the necessary steps to ensure that citizens can fully enjoy the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion. **Luxembourg** recommended for Vietnamese government to protect civil and political rights, especially freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association and **Spain** recommended that to adopt legislative changes to guarantee the protection and free exercise of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

However, under the control of the Vietnamese government, the Khmer Krom did not have rights to access information, as there was surveillance by the Vietnamese intelligence agencies when the Khmer Krom provided information on human rights abuses to the international press, international NGOs, they are often monitored and some are summoned by local police

authorities for questioning and other restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression on social media. There were at least about 20 cases in 2023, Khmer Krom Human Rights activists are summoned, interrogated, arrested, detained and charged by court and some of those are still in prison.

Accordingly, we recommended that Vietnamese government to;

Fully respect and ensure that Khmer Krom people enjoy their rights, including the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly accordance with the article 19 of ICCPCR.

Release anyone currently being held for peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of religion and belief, expression, assembly and association.

We hope the mentioned recommendations will be adopted and implemented in accordance with the Vietnamese Government's mandate to uphold the rights of the Khmer Krom people.

From all of our following coalition;

1. Khmer Kampuchea Krom for Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA)
2. Khmer Kampuchea Krom Community (KKKC)
3. Friendship of Khmer Kampuchea Krom Association (FKKKA)
4. Khmer Kampuchea Krom Cultural Center in Cambodia (KKKCCC)
5. Khmer Fund for the Poor (KFP)
6. Khmer Kampuchea Krom Women Association (KKKWA)
7. Khmer Krom Youth Council (KKYC)

ⁱ Thach Prey Chea Koeun: *Wat in Kampuchea Krom*, Information Department of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Federation 2018

ⁱⁱ <http://www.khmerkrom.org/news-events/human-rights-monitor/142-23khmer-krom-people-statistics>