

# European Parliament

## Exchange of views on the Human Rights situation in Cambodia

Speech by the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation

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25 August 2008

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak on behalf of our Khmer-Krom refugees in Cambodia.

The Khmer-Krom people are the Indigenous Peoples of the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam (also known as Kampuchea Krom in Khmer). On June 4, 1949, Kampuchea Krom was transferred to Vietnam by the French colonial government without the consent of the Indigenous Khmer-Krom Peoples.

The term "stateless peoples" accurately describes the situation of the Khmer-Krom refugees in Cambodia.

In Vietnam, when the Khmer-Krom people stood up for their rights to demand freely practice their Theravada Buddhism or to demand for the return of their confiscated lands, the Vietnamese Communist government oppressed and imprisoned them. Those who escape the border and try to obtain refugee status into Cambodia are met with more obstacles.

Upon arrival to Cambodia, the Cambodian government, under the influence of the Hanoi Regime, rejects their claim as refugees. Instead, the Cambodian government employs a shameful tactic and declares that, "**According to Cambodia's law, when Khmer Krom arrived at Cambodia, they automatically become Cambodian citizen because Khmer Krom is Khmer**".

While this may be seen as a patriotic claim, the Cambodian government does not provide any financial support or protection to the asylum seekers. The issue of a Cambodian Identification card remains a difficult process as the Khmer Krom are forced to change their last name and birth date, thereby erasing their connection to Kampuchea-Krom. With no legal document, many find themselves with no right to vote or look for jobs.

Buddhist monks living in Cambodia, who exercise and use human rights instruments such as peaceful demonstration are heavily discouraged with threats and in some cases have been killed for participating.

For example, on 27 February 2007, after participating in a peaceful demonstration in front of the Vietnamese embassy in Phnom Penh, Venerable Eang Sok Thoeun,

was killed at Tronom Chroeng pagoda, Boeng Thom commune, Ang Snuol district, Kandal province, under mysterious circumstances. His body was buried in haste in the middle of the night by the Cambodian police. The police also forbid bringing his corpse for organizing a Cambodian traditional funeral ceremony.

On June 30, 2007, Venerable Tim Sakhorn was arrested, defrocked and deported by Cambodia government to imprison him in Vietnam until June 28, 2008. He was accused of "undermining the friendship between Cambodia and Vietnam." His only crime, if a crime at all was to help provide, shelter Khmer Krom fleeing the border and promote human rights. Serving a sentence that he did not commit, Venerable Tim Sakhorn is currently placed under house detention; a sentence that was not recognised during his trial in November 2007.

On December 17, 2007, approximately 50 Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks in Phnom Penh marched peacefully to Vietnamese Embassy to hand up a petition asking Vietnam to release their fellow Buddhist monks. The Vietnam Embassy refused to take the petition and ordered the Cambodian polices to disperse the monks. Electric batons were used by the Cambodian police against the defenceless monks rendering three monks were unconscious namely, Venerable Ly Vanny, Venerable Meng Savan Dararithy and Venerable Lam Keo Samnang. Fifteen other monks were wounded.

As a result of the high volatile situation in, many Khmer-Krom and Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks have fled Cambodia to seek refugee status in Thailand. According to the refugees, the Cambodian government has warned them with threats of arrest and deportation back to Vietnam if they continued to promote human rights activities such as the case of Venerable Tim Sakhorn. The Khmer Krom refugees have been warned that if they continue to protest against the Vietnam, they would be killed by the Vietnamese secret agents in Cambodia.

The examples clearly show dangerous situation that the Khmer Krom people find themselves in Cambodia. We are particularly concerned that Cambodia does not take seriously the human rights violation that is happening within its borders and in Vietnam against it own ethnic Khmer people. There is no feedback process or effort made by the Cambodian government to report the human rights violation to international organisations such as UNHCR and the UN.

On behalf of the Khmer Krom refugees in Cambodia, I would like to appeal for your assistance to:

- Urge Cambodia government to recognize Khmer Krom as refugees when they arrived at Cambodia because they flee from Vietnam seeking for refugee status. If Cambodia tactically considers Khmer Krom refugees as Cambodia citizen, then the world will not know that Khmer Krom escaped Vietnam because of the human rights violations committed by Vietnamese government.

- Urge Cambodian government to negotiate with Vietnam for the release and return of Venerable Tim Sakhorn, who is a Cambodian Citizen to Cambodia.
- Ask the Cambodian government to implement initiatives, program to help refugees fleeing the border rather than just status recognition to ensure that these refugees are given immediate aid and protection rather than left to fend for themselves.
- Urge Cambodia government to conduct a thorough and independent investigation into the murder case of Ven. Eang Sok Thoeun and bring the killer to the court.
- Urge Cambodia government to respect the basic right to conduct peaceful demonstration of the Khmer Krom Buddhist monks who just demand to release their fellow Buddhist monks from prison in Vietnam.
- Urge the government members of the European Parliament to provide support to Khmer Krom refugees who are living in difficult situation in Thailand. If possible, please help granting them the refugee status to live in your country.

Thank you for your kind attention.