

# **European Parliament**

## **Exchange of views on the Human Rights situation in Vietnam**

### **Speech by the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation**

**Mr. Thach Ngoc Thach**

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As representatives of our people in the Mekong Delta, we are particularly concerned with the current human rights situation in Kampuchea-Krom and Vietnam's systematic and deliberate efforts to discourage the use of human rights instruments such as peaceful protests to highlight important issues.

Since February 2007, more than a dozen spiritual leaders have been defrocked without ceremony or dignity for participating in a peaceful demonstration demanding religious freedom. Five Khmer Krom Buddhist monks were defrocked, tortured and are currently serving 2-4 years prison for organising the protest.

Venerable Tim Sakhorn, Cambodian citizen of Khmer Krom descent was arrested, defrocked and deported by Cambodia authorities to Vietnam on June 30, 2007. On November 8, 2007, Venerable Tim Sakhorn to one year imprisonment under Article 87 of Vietnam's panel code on the charges of "Undermining National Unity". Today, Tim Sakhorn remains in house detention in An Giang with under heavy surveillance, a condition which was not previous mentioned during the court hearing.

Khmer Krom farmers have also been violently targeted for conducting peaceful demonstrations demanding for the return of their ancestral lands. Land activists such as Mr. Chau Inn and his family has been shot at while Mrs. Ly Huong's house was deliberately lit, crops confiscated by the State and her brother imprisoned for attempting to protect his life.

Many Khmer Krom people, including women and the elderly continue to have limited access to basic health care facilities. For example, at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2004, we first brought up the issue of blinded farmers and urged Vietnam to investigate the likely cause of this blindness. To date, nothing has been done to provide medical aid to the affected families.

The educational system in Vietnam is also failing for the Khmer Krom students. Instead of offering more Khmer classes so that their first language is preserved, more Vietnamese classes are being offered. Teaching the real history of Kampuchea-Krom remains prohibited and in some areas, funds and initiatives to teach the Khmer language is nonexistent.

The above cases are just some of the example of recent human rights violated. We are concerned that Vietnam is not making concrete efforts towards the promotion and realisation of human rights in the Mekong Delta. There continues to be inadequate facilities and tools to educate local and national authorities on human rights. As a result basic fundamental freedoms and rights continue to be violated at the grassroots level and innocent victims such as Tim Sakhorn are tortured and imprisoned for exercising human rights instruments.

We would like to ask for the assistance of EU Human Rights Commission to

- Urge Vietnam to release Venerable Tim Sakhorn from all conditions and allow for his return to Cambodia where all his family and relatives reside.
- Urge Vietnam to immediately release Venerable Kim Moeun, Venerable Danh Ton, Venerable Thach Thuong, Venerable Ly Hoang and Venerable Ly Suong who are currently imprisoned in Khleang (rename Soc Trang) province.
- Urge Vietnam to allow our Buddhist monks to create an independent Theravada Buddhist organization to promote our rich history, religion and culture and not one that only promotes the one way policy propaganda of the VC government.
- Ask that Vietnam start implement human rights programs and initiatives in both Khmer and Vietnamese to educate officials and civilians at the grassroots levels.
- Call on Vietnam to have a human rights dialogue with KKF, with the assistant of EU to address the legitimate grievances of the Khmer-Krom people and work together for a long-term solution that respects and promotes the human right and dignity of every Khmer-Krom.
- Help work with the Khmer Krom peoples and the Vietnam government to build on existing traditional forms of education which exists in our Khmer pagodas. For example Khmer Krom children from levels 1 to 5 should be encouraged to attend their traditional form of education via our Khmer temples. That a class installs two teachers, one that teaches Khmer and the other Vietnamese so that it is a fair system for all.

During Human Rights Council meeting last March, Vietnam announced that it was ready for human rights dialogue. We would like to appeal for the help of the European Parliament Sub Committee on Human Rights to help set up an open dialogue between Vietnam and KKF. By doing so, we can start the process of identifying and resolving the human rights issues so that the Khmer Krom people can begin to enjoy the basic fundamental freedoms and rights guaranteed under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Please refer to our detailed report for more information regarding recent violations.