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Vietnam Must Obligate Its Commitments to Human Rights Council

On November 12, 2013, Vietnam was elected to become a member of the UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC) to uphold its commitments to promote and protect human rights as set forth in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/251. Despite being a member for almost a year, Vietnam has not demonstrated a serious commitment to the protection or the promotion of human rights for people around the world. Instead Vietnam continues to violate the fundamental rights of the people living in Vietnam, especially the Indigenous Khmer-Krom Peoples living in the Mekong Delta and its surrounding areas.

On June 20, 2014, Vietnam rejected 45 key recommendations out of 227 recommendations made by Member States during its Second Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) held on February 5, 2014. The recommendations rejected contained important core fundamental human rights which the people in Vietnam need the most, such as freedom of religion, freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of forming independent associations.

Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief was invited to visit Vietnam from 21 – 31 July, 2014. The last visit of former UN Special Rapporteur, Mr. Abdelfattah was in 1998. In concluding his 10 days visit to Vietnam, Mr. Bielefeldt noted that *“I received credible information that some individuals with whom I wanted to meet had been under heavy surveillance, warned, intimidated, harassed or prevented from travelling by the police.”*

As a member of the UN HRC, Vietnam still does not allow its Indigenous Peoples in Vietnam to learn the true history of the land and the origins of its people. The Khmer-Krom people are not allowed to call their villages, districts and provinces in their original Khmer names. For example, a seal containing the word “Kampuchea-Krom” in the Khmer script (renamed Tra Vinh) has been a contentious issue for a Khmer-Krom temple in Preah Trapeang after Vietnamese official ordered the Abbot of the temple to hand it over to the State. On August 5, 2014, according to the Khmer-Krom Buddhist followers of this temple, Major General Le Thanh Dau, Provincial Police Director came in person to ask the Abbot to hand over the seal to the authority.

On July 8, 2014, Vietnam Embassy in Phnom Penh issued a Press Release accusing the “Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation and “Federation of Cambodian Intellectuals and Students” for conducting peaceful protest in front of its embassy and stated that *“this move an act of intervention into the sovereignty and internal affairs of Vietnam, going contrary to the laws of the Kingdom of Cambodia.”* If Mr. Tran Van Thong did not fabricate the true history of Mekong Delta during his interview with Radio Free Asia by claiming that Kampuchea-Krom belong to Vietnam a long time ago, then the Khmer-Krom people and the Khmer youths in Cambodia would not conduct a protest to demand a public apology to the Cambodian people for making such a statement. The Vietnam Embassy in Cambodia did not send a representative to receive the petition letter from the peaceful protesters.

On August 13, 2014, the Vietnamese spokesman Le Hai Binh demanded Cambodia punish the protesters who burned Vietnam’s flag during the protest on August 12, 2014. *“Vietnam demands that Cambodia strictly try these extremists in accordance with the law and take effective measures to prevent similar actions from repeating in the future,”* said Mr. Binh. On August 15, Cambodian Ministry of Interior Spokesman, Mr. Khieu Sopheak told Radio Free Asia during his interview that the flag burning incident during a protest is simply *“expressing their opinions in a democratic country.”*

Vietnam continues to violate the basic fundamental rights and freedoms of its people living within its border and in Cambodia. In Kampuchea-Krom, the Khmer-Krom people are prohibited to learn their true history and call their homeland by their original names. Such action clearly demonstrates to the world that Vietnam does not uphold its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, and thus should have its position as a member of the UN Human Rights Council be reconsidered.