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KHMERS KAMPUCHEA-KROM FEDERATION

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Vietnam Detained Khmer-Krom Youth for Distributing the UN DRIP

On Thursday, September 13, 2007, the General Assembly voted to adopt the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP). As a member state, Vietnam signed to adopt this crucial and historical document.

Since signing to the adoption of the UN DRIP, Vietnam has continued to deny the existence of the indigenous peoples within its border. Vietnam has labeled the indigenous peoples as the “ethnic minority.”

The Khmer-Krom people, the indigenous peoples of the Mekong Delta, have been living on their ancestral lands for thousands of years before the Vietnamese people came to live in the region. Lacking recognition as the indigenous peoples, the Khmer-Krom people have not enjoyed the fundamental rights enshrined in the UN DRIP.

Instead of trying to protect and promote the fundamental rights of the indigenous peoples, Vietnam has tried to use all the tactics to make the indigenous peoples invisible in their homeland by not recognizing their true identity. The Khmer-Krom people are not allowed to identify themselves as Khmer-Krom, but being labeled as “Khmer Nam Bo.” Moreover, even Vietnam signed to adopt UN DRIP, but Vietnam has not translated the UN DRIP to the indigenous language and distributed the UN DRIP freely to indigenous peoples.

Vietnam is a one-party communist state. Vietnam does not allow freedom of association. As a non-profit organization based in the United States to advocate for the fundamental rights of the voiceless Khmer-Krom in the Mekong Delta, the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) has not allowed operating in Vietnam. KKF has leveraged social media to remotely educate the voiceless Khmer-Krom in the Khmer language about the fundamental rights enshrined in the treaties, including the UN DRIP, which Vietnam signed with the United Nations.

The Khmer-Krom youths who can afford to access the Internet can read the UN DRIP and understand their rights. Some of the Khmer-Krom youths have started to print and share the UN DRIP. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese authority has tried to stop instead of encouraging what the Khmer-Krom has been doing to promote the UN DRIP.

About 4 pm, April 13, 2021, one day before the Khmer-Krom starts celebrating their New Year, the Vietnamese authority sent more than a hundred police to surround Duong Khai's house.

Born on August 30, 1994, Duong Khai is a Khmer-Krom youth, along with his parents, left their beloved village in Dai Bai A hamlet, Lac Hoa village, Vinh Chau district Soc Trang province to look for work in Dong Nai province. His family is renting a house close to their workplace in Song Trau commune, Trang Bom district, Dong Nai province. Duong Khai is working for the San Lim Furniture company at nightshift.

Before the police raid his house, his mom went to buy food to prepare dinner for his family. To be safe, his mom locked the door while Khai was still sleeping inside. While the police surrounded his house and tried to break into his home, his mom returned and asked the police why they tried to break into her house. The police responded that they need to do the “Kiểm Tra Hành Chánh (Administrative Examination),” checking for the Identification and household papers.

When Duong Khai heard his mom's voice arguing with the police, he woke up and tried to use his phone to record the police searching his house. The police immediately confiscated his phone, his computer and continued searching his home without the warrant. The police seized a hundred copies of the UN DRIP. To prevent the family members of Duong Khai Livestream on social media, the authority coordinated with the electrical and Internet companies to turn off the power and Wi-Fi for the whole block of where his house locates.

After confiscated the UN DRIP, the police started questioning Duong Khai until 10 pm. Duong Khai refused to cooperate because he said that the police did not have the warrant to search his house and illegally confiscated his phone, computer, and the UN DRIP. When the police saw that Duong Khai did not cooperate, they started arresting him and brought him to the Trang Bom police station. Worrying for his safety, his mom wanted to go with him, but the police did not allow her.

At the police station, Duong Khai faced mental torture. Five police continuously questioned him, and about 30 police are standing and sitting nearby to put pressure on him indirectly. Even Duong Khai had not been physically tortured, but he was threatened to be beaten up. During their questioning against Duong Khai, the police recorded his entire conversation with them. But when they intimidated and threatened to beat him up to extract his forced confession, the police immediately turned off the recording.

Duong Khai had been detained and questioned until noon the next day. After questioning and intimidating Duong Khai for more than 12 hours, the police could not find any good reason to arrest him, so he was released. The police returned his phone and computer, but not even a copy of the UN DRIP.

In this regard, the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation publicly urges the United Nations and the international community to ask Vietnam, as a member state of the United Nations, to:

- Return the confiscated UN DRIP to Duong Khai immediately without any condition.
- Print and distribute the UN DRIP for the indigenous peoples in Vietnam to understand their rights enshrined in the UN DRIP.

- Stop using police force to arrest and detain the Khmer-Krom who want to promote the work of the United Nations by printing and distributing the UN DRIP. The Khmer-Krom youths printed the UN DRIP to distribute without charge. Publishing and distributing the UN DRIP should be the responsibility of Vietnam as a member state, not the Khmer-Krom youths.
- Implement the Convention against Torture that Vietnam ratified with the United Nations in 2015 to prevent using intimidating tactics as the mental torture against the Khmer-Krom, such as the case of Duong Khai.
- Compensate Duong Khai mentally torture him all night because he did not commit any crime besides helping to distribute the UN DRIP.
- To stop using the controversial cybersecurity law to monitoring and punishing the Khmer-Krom youths who merely want to freely receive and share information on social media, especially about the human rights information or treaties that Vietnam signed with the United Nations.