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KHMERS KAMPUCHEA-KROM FEDERATION

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Shadow Report submitted to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights for the consideration of the Fourth periodic report submitted by Viet Nam (CCPR/C/VNM/4) during the examination of Viet Nam in the 144th Session

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Introduction

The Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) respectfully submits this shadow report to the 144th Session of the Human Rights Committee, responding to Viet Nam's Fourth Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

While Viet Nam claims progress in protecting civil and political rights, the reality for the Khmer-Krom people has significantly deteriorated since the 2019 review. Far from improving, human rights violations against the Khmer-Krom have escalated, with systemic discrimination, arbitrary arrests, and repression becoming routine responses to their peaceful advocacy for fundamental rights.

This report seeks to shed light on the ongoing human rights abuses faced by the Khmer-Krom people, focusing particularly on their cultural identity, religious freedoms, and political participation—areas where Viet Nam's claims of progress stand in stark contrast to the lived experiences of this marginalized community. Moreover, this submission offers concrete recommendations to Viet Nam, urging it to uphold its obligations under the ICCPR and take meaningful steps to protect and promote the fundamental rights of the Khmer-Krom people.

Compliance with the ICCPR

Article 1: Right to Self-Determination

In Paragraph 20 of Viet Nam's report, the government claims to promote national unity, emphasizing equality among ethnic groups and ensuring the development of all communities. However, this assertion stands in stark contrast to the persistent denial of the Khmer-Krom people's indigenous status. Despite their distinct language, culture, and religion, the Khmer-Krom continue to be systematically denied recognition as an indigenous people, which undermines their right to self-determination, as enshrined in Article 1 of the ICCPR.

This denial of their indigenous identity directly contradicts Viet Nam's commitment to ensuring the freedom of its people to exercise their cultural, religious, and linguistic rights fully. Furthermore, Khmer-Krom activists, such as Mrs. Dinh Thi Huynh, Mr. Danh Minh Quang, Mr. To Hoang Chuong, and Mr. Thach Cuong, have faced arbitrary arrest and imprisonment for merely advocating for their indigenous rights. In 2024, these activists were sentenced to two to four years in prison after being detained for six months and tried in closed-door hearings for distributing UNDRIP documents. This treatment clearly violates their fundamental rights under international law, particularly the ICCPR.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- Why does Viet Nam continue to deny the Khmer-Krom people's indigenous status despite their longstanding historical and cultural ties to their homeland in the Mekong Delta?
- When will Viet Nam officially recognize the Khmer-Krom as indigenous peoples, in accordance with international law, particularly the UNDRIP?
- What specific measures are Viet Nam taking to enable the Khmer-Krom people to fully exercise their right to self-determination, including cultural, linguistic, and religious autonomy, free from government interference?

Article 2: Ensure rights without discrimination

In paragraph 23 of Viet Nam's report, the government asserts that it ensures equality for all its citizens and offers comprehensive protections against discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or other status.

However, while Viet Nam claims to uphold non-discrimination, the Khmer-Krom people continue to endure systemic exclusion and discrimination in multiple aspects of life. This is not limited to religious oppression but extends to cultural expression, employment, and housing, significantly affecting their daily lives. The Khmer-Krom are subjected to discriminatory policies designed to marginalize their community and restrict their ability to enjoy their rights as guaranteed under the ICCPR.

One of the most evident forms of discrimination is the state's control over religious practices. The government enforces the forced alignment of Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks with the Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), an institution under government control. This interference undermines the Khmer-Krom's right to religious freedom and prevents them from practicing their faith autonomously, further infringing upon their cultural identity and indigenous rights.

Moreover, Khmer-Krom activists who speak out for their community face severe reprisals that threaten their livelihoods and safety. Authorities actively pressure employers not to hire Khmer-Krom activists and landlords not to rent to them, creating a climate of fear and insecurity. These targeted actions make it difficult for activists to support their families and continue their advocacy work, further marginalizing those who bravely stand up for their fundamental rights.

Khmer-Krom activist Mr. Thach Nga in Tra Vinh province faces significant challenges in finding stable employment due to state intimidation. To support his family, he collects recyclable materials, but on October 10, 2024, he was nearly involved in a police-induced motorcycle accident, an act of intimidation aimed at silencing him. On March 27, 2025, he was arrested for the alleged crime of "Abusing democratic freedoms" under Article 331 of the Viet Nam criminal code. Additionally, on October 15, 2024, police in Binh Duong province unlawfully searched the

home of activist Trieu Sieu, seizing personal belongings and pressuring his landlord to evict his family. As a result, Trieu Sieu now lives in constant uncertainty, struggling to find work and fearing further retaliation.

These reprisals are part of a broader strategy to silence Khmer-Krom activists and prevent them from advocating for their rights. They highlight the discriminatory treatment faced by the Khmer-Krom community, who are deprived of the fundamental right to live and work freely without the constant threat of harassment or retaliation. This ongoing discrimination undermines their ability to exercise their fundamental freedoms and participate fully in society.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- When will Viet Nam take concrete and meaningful steps to end the discrimination against the Khmer-Krom people, especially regarding their cultural and religious rights?
- How will Viet Nam guarantee that the Khmer-Krom people can freely practice Theravada Buddhism without government control or interference, mainly through the imposition of state-controlled Viet Nameese Mahayana Buddhism?
- What specific measures will Viet Nam implement to address the systemic discrimination faced by the Khmer-Krom, particularly in the areas of education, employment, and political participation, and to stop the use of reprisals against Khmer-Krom activists who advocate for their rights?

Article 3: Ensure equal rights of men & women

In response to paragraph 27 of Viet Nam's state report regarding the promotion and increase of women's participation in all fields, it is important to highlight the stark contrast between these claims and the reality faced by Khmer-Krom women. Despite the resilience and determination shown by Khmer-Krom women in advocating for their rights, including their efforts to raise awareness about gender equality and women's rights, they are met with suppression and intimidation from the authorities.

On International Women's Day in 2023, Khmer-Krom women in Tra Vinh province organized an event to celebrate the day and highlight their challenges, including triple discrimination based on gender, indigenous status, and economic standing. However, this event was disrupted by Viet Nameese authorities, and shortly afterward, Mrs. Dinh Thi Huynh and Chau Thi Thien, both of whom participated in the event, were summoned by the police in Soc Trang province. On March 8, 2025, the Khmer-Krom women in Tra Vinh province had to organize the International Women's Day at a Khmer-Krom temple because the Viet Nameese authorities tried to block them from organizing this crucial event. Even though the event was celebrated at the temple, the Viet Nameese authorities sent nonuniform police to interrupt the event. Still, the Khmer-Krom women bravely stood up and successfully finished the event. This act of intimidation was an apparent

attempt to silence and discourage Khmer-Krom women from continuing their advocacy for gender equality and women's rights.

These actions starkly contradict Viet Nam's assertions that it promotes women's participation in all areas. Instead, Khmer-Krom women face harassment, intimidation, and the threat of imprisonment simply for advocating for their rights, highlighting a deep discrepancy between official reports and the lived realities of these women.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- Why does Viet Nam continue to intimidate and summon Khmer-Krom women who are simply advocating for their fundamental rights, including their right to gender equality and participation in public life?
- What steps will Viet Nam take to ensure that Khmer-Krom women are able to freely express their views and participate in public affairs without fear of retaliation or intimidation?

**Article 4: Limitations determined by law & compatible with nature of rights;
Article 5: No destruction or derogation of fundamental human rights**

Under Article 4 of the ICCPR, Viet Nam can derogate from certain rights during a state of emergency, but these measures must be necessary, proportional, and temporary. However, the Khmer-Krom workers quarantined at the Nam Tan Uyen Industrial Park during the COVID-19 pandemic faced severe neglect and inhumane conditions that did not align with these principles.

A tragic example of this neglect is the case of Mrs. Thi Hon, a 40-year-old pregnant Khmer-Krom woman, who passed away inside the quarantine center on August 20, 2021, due to the lack of timely medical assistance. Her family attempted to call hospitals and quarantine center officials for help but received no response. Despite her brother's desperate efforts to perform CPR, Mrs. Thi Hon died, along with her unborn child. This heartbreaking incident reflects the failure to provide necessary medical care to vulnerable individuals during the pandemic.

Furthermore, thousands of workers, many of whom were Khmer-Krom, lived in overcrowded conditions without proper food, medical support, or sanitation. These conditions exacerbated their vulnerability to the virus and failed to meet the standards required by Article 4 of the ICCPR, which mandates that any measures taken during emergencies must be proportional, necessary, and temporary.

Moreover, Article 5 of the ICCPR ensures that fundamental human rights cannot be derogated from, even in times of emergency. However, the Khmer-Krom workers during the pandemic were subjected to severe human rights violations, including the denial of medical care, substandard living conditions, and harassment. These actions are inconsistent with the ICCPR's protection of non-derogable rights, such as the right to health, right to life, and right to dignity.

The tragic death of Mrs. Thi Hon underscores the failure to provide essential healthcare and support to the Khmer-Krom community. The lack of adequate food, poor sanitation, and overcrowded living conditions in the quarantine centers violated these non-derogable rights. Despite the global health emergency, these conditions went unaddressed, and the government's response failed to meet the standards outlined in Article 5 of the ICCPR.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- How does Viet Nam justify the failure to provide adequate medical care and living conditions for Khmer-Krom workers quarantined in Nam Tan Uyen Industrial Park during the pandemic? Was this response proportional and necessary, and how does it align with the principles of the ICCPR, particularly regarding the protection of vulnerable groups like the Khmer-Krom?
- Given the tragic death of Mrs. Thi Hon and the lack of healthcare provision for Khmer-Krom workers during the pandemic, how does Viet Nam ensure that no fundamental human rights are derogated or violated under Article 5 of the ICCPR, even during times of public health emergencies?
- What specific steps is Viet Nam taking to ensure adequate medical care for Khmer-Krom workers in quarantine, including providing proper health support, food, and sanitization? Furthermore, how does Viet Nam plan to ensure that Khmer-Krom workers receive fair access to vaccines and other critical services, in light of their vulnerability during the pandemic?

Article 6: Right to life

The Khmer-Krom people in the Mekong Delta continue to face severe impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Despite Viet Nam receiving millions of dollars in foreign aid to combat these challenges, the Khmer-Krom have not received any support from these funds. Many Khmer-Krom community members are unaware of the full scale of climate change's effect on their land, primarily because they are too focused on surviving day-to-day due to their extreme poverty. The Khmer-Krom are often left out of decision-making processes regarding environmental protection and adaptation measures, exacerbating their vulnerability to climate-related events, including flooding, saltwater intrusion, and soil degradation.

Additionally, the Viet Nameese government enforces unsustainable farming practices, such as forcing the Khmer-Krom to grow rice in three seasons per year to maximize export production. This policy, designed to support Viet Nam's rice export industry, has severely disadvantaged Khmer-Krom farmers. The intensive farming cycles degrade soil quality, increase dependency on harmful chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and ultimately drive Khmer-Krom farmers deeper into poverty. Despite their labor being critical to Viet Nam's rice export success, the Khmer-Krom received little benefit, with rice prices artificially suppressed, leaving them with no profits

and increasing debt. This economic exploitation has resulted in land loss, forced migration to urban areas, and the erosion of their cultural identity.

Viet Nam's continued use of the death penalty and harsh criminal charges to intimidate and silence activists also directly threatens the right to life for those who stand up for the Khmer-Krom people's rights. Khmer-Krom activists are often charged under vague laws, such as "abusing democratic freedoms" and "national security", which can lead to lengthy sentences, including the death penalty. The arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, and violations of due process are part of a broader pattern of repression. For instance, Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra, a prominent Khmer-Krom monk, was arrested without due process on November 22, 2023, along with Mr. Kim Khiem, after being accused of "abusing democratic freedoms." His disappearance for several hours during his arrest and the subsequent false charges against him exemplify how the Khmer-Krom community is denied justice and subjected to a climate of fear, where speaking out for fundamental rights is met with severe repression.

On March 27, 2025, Mr. Thach Xuan Dong was arrested alongside Mr. Thach Nga on charges of "abusing democratic freedoms." This arrest directly resulted from his advocacy for indigenous rights, including distributing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and participating in events celebrating International Human Rights, such as International Women's Day.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- How does Viet Nam justify the failure to provide any support to the Khmer-Krom community in the Mekong Delta, despite receiving significant international funding for climate change adaptation, and what steps will Viet Nam take to ensure the Khmer-Krom are included in environmental protection efforts and benefit from these funds?
- Given the severe impact of the forced three-crop farming policy on Khmer-Krom farmers, which leads to environmental degradation, debt, and poverty, what steps is Viet Nam taking to end these unsustainable agricultural practices and allow the Khmer-Krom to return to their traditional, sustainable farming methods?
- In light of the use of the death penalty and arbitrary arrests to silence Khmer-Krom activists, how does Viet Nam plan to ensure the right to life is upheld for Khmer-Krom activists, and what measures will Viet Nam take to prevent forced disappearances and unlawful detentions of those advocating for the Khmer-Krom community's rights?

Article 7: Right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

In paragraph 41 of Viet Nam's state report, it is claimed that the country published a booklet in 2019 to improve the implementation of the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Unfortunately,

this assertion contradicts the ongoing practices against Khmer-Krom activists, who continue to face torture and forced confessions.

For example, on June 19, 2023, Mr. Lam Vong, a Khmer-Krom activist, was arrested without a court order and subjected to physical assault during his detention, including blows to his stomach and neck. These acts were aimed at intimidating him into silence for advocating the rights of the Khmer-Krom community and distributing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Similarly, Mr. To Hoang Chuong was arrested on June 23, 2023, and subjected to physical abuse, including a blow to the forehead. Despite denying wrongdoing, he was forced to sign a confession under duress, highlighting the pattern of torture and intimidation used by authorities to silence peaceful advocates.

Furthermore, Mr. Danh Set was detained for two days in March 2023, during which he was coerced into signing a false confession implicating the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation in supposed anti-government activities. This violates Article 7 of the ICCPR, which prohibits forced confessions and the use of coercion in legal proceedings.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- What steps will Viet Nam take to ensure that Khmer-Krom activists are no longer subjected to torture, forced confessions, or other forms of inhumane treatment during detention or interrogation?
- Given the consistent pattern of torture and coerced confessions against Khmer-Krom activists, what measures will Viet Nam implement to end the use of these practices and guarantee the safety and well-being of individuals advocating for Khmer-Krom rights?

Article 8: Right to be free from forced or compulsory labor

In paragraph 42 of Viet Nam's state report, the government claims to have various decrees and laws in place to prevent forced labor. However, the reality on the ground, particularly for Khmer-Krom workers, paints a different picture. Khmer-Krom workers, as part of marginalized groups, continue to face exploitative labor practices, including forced labor and human trafficking. Unfortunately, due to the lack of independent labor unions in Viet Nam, workers, especially those from marginalized communities like the Khmer-Krom, have no legitimate avenue to file complaints or seek redress for labor violations.

When the Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists are imprisoned unjustly and subjected to forced labor while incarcerated, these individuals are assigned labor tasks with tight deadlines, and if they fail to complete the work within a given day, they face physical punishment such as being struck in the face, or they are fined. Such treatment clearly violates the ICCPR. Firstly, these Khmer-Krom monks and activists should not be imprisoned at all for merely exercising

their rights to advocate for their indigenous and religious freedoms. Secondly, even if they were detained, the imposition of forced labor upon them while incarcerated constitutes a form of modern-day slavery and a direct violation of Article 8 of the ICCPR. These monks and activists are being treated as slave laborers, not as individuals entitled to basic human rights and dignity. This not only infringes on their human rights but also exacerbates the already unjust conditions they face.

Viet Nam has not allowed the creation of independent labor unions, leaving workers without a voice to challenge unlawful practices, such as forced labor. This absence of a legal recourse significantly hinders their ability to protect their fundamental rights and dignity.

Additionally, recent reports, including alarming news circulating on social media, highlight that the laborers have been subjected to human trafficking and forced into exploitative labor conditions in neighboring countries in Southeast Asia. These workers have often been lured with promises of employment, only to find themselves trapped in conditions of forced labor and torture. The inability to report such abuses due to the lack of independent legal channels exacerbates the vulnerability of these workers, particularly for the Khmer-Krom community.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- Given that Viet Nam has not allowed the establishment of independent labor unions and that Khmer-Krom workers remain vulnerable to forced labor and human trafficking, what concrete steps will Viet Nam take to allow the creation of independent labor unions, strengthen protections against forced labor, and ensure that workers, especially the Khmer-Krom, have access to legal channels to report exploitation and seek justice?
- What specific actions will Viet Nam take to ensure that Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists are not subjected to forced labor or punished for failing to meet arbitrary work quotas while imprisoned? What steps will Viet Nam take to ensure that all persons, including those wrongfully imprisoned for exercising their rights, are treated with dignity and in accordance with international standards?

Article 9: Right to liberty and security of person

Paragraph 45 of Viet Nam's state report asserts that any person arrested or detained has the right to defend themselves or have legal representation by lawyers or others. However, this statement fails to reflect the reality faced by Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists. In the case of Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra, he was arrested without a court order while returning to his temple from a blessing ceremony. The arbitrary detention of Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra and other Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists violates the principles of due process and fair trial under international human rights law.

The Khmer-Krom monks and activists have been systematically denied their basic right to a fair trial and legal defense. In addition, the absence of court orders for their detention and the failure to provide legal counsel for Khmer-Krom detainees are part of a broader pattern of repression against individuals exercising their right to freedom of religion and cultural identity. The Viet Nameese authorities continue to ignore international standards for due process and accountability in their treatment of Khmer-Krom activists.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- How will Viet Nam ensure that all individuals, including Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists, are granted access to legal representation, including lawyers of their choice, during detention, prosecution, and trial, by ICCPR provisions and international fair trial standards?
- What concrete steps will Viet Nam take to prevent arbitrary detention of Khmer-Krom activists, including ensuring court orders are obtained before detention and ensuring that detainees are not held isolated for extended periods without access to family members or legal counsel?

Article 12: Right to Liberty and Freedom of Movement

Paragraph 66 of Viet Nam's Report claims that freedom of movement is guaranteed under the 2013 Constitution and is aligned with international law standards. However, this claim does not reflect the reality faced by Khmer-Krom activists and Khmer-Krom individuals abroad who frequently encounter significant barriers and harassment when attempting to travel abroad or return to their homeland. The Viet Nameese authorities routinely restrict the movement of activists, especially those advocating for the fundamental rights of the Khmer-Krom community.

For example, many Khmer-Krom activists are frequently forbidden from traveling abroad to attend international human rights conferences or meetings. This restriction directly violates their right to freedom of movement under the ICCPR, which should guarantee the right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's own country. Furthermore, even Khmer-Krom individuals who have received visas to return to Viet Nam and visit their families often experience intimidation and harassment by Viet Nameese authorities. Upon arrival, they are forced to report to local police about their stay and travel plans, a requirement not imposed on Viet Nameese citizens but systematically applied to Khmer-Krom travelers. Failure to comply with this requirement often results in harassment and threats of arrest. The Viet Nameese authorities regularly use these tactics to intimidate and silence Khmer-Krom activists and to suppress their advocacy for human rights. These actions highlight the government's ongoing practice of limiting freedom of movement for those who seek to raise awareness about the struggles of the Khmer-Krom community.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- What measures will Viet Nam take to ensure that Khmer-Krom activists and individuals abroad are not arbitrarily restricted from traveling abroad, mainly to attend international human rights conferences and meetings, by their right to freedom of movement under the ICCPR?
- How will Viet Nam address the harassment and intimidation faced by Khmer-Krom individuals when returning to Viet Nam, particularly the requirement to report to local police and the threats of arrest or harassment that are not imposed on Viet Nameese citizens but are disproportionately applied to Khmer-Krom travelers?

Articles 14 & 15: Right to Equality Before the Law, Presumption of Innocence, Fair Trial

Viet Nam's Report (Paragraph 72) claims that every person in Viet Nam is equal before the law and entitled to equal procedural rights as outlined in the 2013 Constitution and the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, this claim does not reflect the reality faced by Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists. When Khmer-Krom activists were arrested, they were denied the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14 and 15 of the ICCPR, which ensure the right to equality before the law, the presumption of innocence, and the right to a fair trial.

For instance, Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra was arrested without a warrant, and his family was not informed of his whereabouts until a day later when the government's media reported his arrest. Just two days later, the police arrested four more Buddhist monks at his temple, along with other Khmer-Krom activists. These individuals were denied access to legal representation and held for several months without being able to meet with a lawyer. After being detained, Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra was subjected to a closed-door trial. He was forced to read a false confession before the trial, which was publicly broadcast by the authorities immediately after the trial. This practice violates his presumption of innocence and his right to a fair trial, as guaranteed under Article 14 of the ICCPR, which ensures that everyone is entitled to a fair hearing and representation by a lawyer. The use of forced confessions, secret trials, and the denial of legal counsel severely undermine the right to equality before the law and the right to a fair trial, reflecting the systematic denial of these rights for Khmer-Krom activists.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- What concrete measures will Viet Nam take to ensure that Khmer-Krom activists and religious leaders, like Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra, are guaranteed access to legal representation from the moment of detention and are not subject to closed-door trials or forced confessions?

- How will Viet Nam ensure the presumption of innocence for Khmer-Krom activists, and what steps will be taken to ensure that all detainees are informed of their rights and are not denied access to their families or prevented from meeting with legal counsel during detention?

Article 18: Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion

In Paragraphs 84 and 85 of Viet Nam's Report, the government claims that Viet Nam is a multi-religious country, with freedom of religion ensured by the Law on Belief and Religion (LBR) and other legislation. However, the Law on Belief and Religion (LBR) imposes stringent controls over religious organizations, forcing all religious groups to register with the government and operate under state-controlled entities. This system denies Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and communities the right to practice their faith independently, forcing them to adhere to the Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), a government-controlled organization. This is a direct violation of their freedom of religion, as outlined in Article 18 of the ICCPR, which guarantees individuals the right to practice and manifest their religion freely and without interference.

For generations, the Khmer-Krom people have practiced Theravada Buddhism, a distinct branch of Buddhism from the Mahayana Buddhism practiced by the Viet Nameese majority. However, the Viet Nameese government forces the Khmer-Krom to practice under the Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha, severely restricting their religious autonomy. Khmer-Krom monks who refuse to join the VBS face threats, intimidation, and even expulsion from the monkhood. The government has imposed the VBS's Mahayana practices on Khmer-Krom monks, even forcing them to bow to Viet Nameese monks in the VBS hierarchy, regardless of their seniority. This forced integration into the VBS undermines the independent practice of Theravada Buddhism, which is central to the Khmer-Krom people's identity and culture. The VBS's control extends to other aspects of religious life, such as the appointment of temple leadership, the use of the Khmer language in temples, and the imposition of political indoctrination on Khmer-Krom monks. These actions directly violate their religious freedom and cultural autonomy.

Venerable Kim Som Rinh, a respected spiritual leader and a steadfast advocate for the Khmer-Krom people's religious and indigenous rights, has long been dedicated to promoting Khmer-Krom identity and preserving cultural traditions through peaceful activities. Despite his unwavering adherence to Buddhist principles, on March 25, 2024, the Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) unjustly stripped him of his monk status despite no violation of Buddhist rules. Left without a place to turn, he returned to his parents' home, awaiting the inevitable. On March 27, 2025, he was arrested on the vague charge of "abusing democratic freedoms"—an apparent attempt to suppress his advocacy for religious and cultural rights. This arbitrary defrocking and arrests are part of a broader campaign to silence the Khmer-Krom community's peaceful efforts

to express their cultural identity and religious beliefs, highlighting the severe persecution faced by those who courageously stand up for their fundamental rights.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- What specific measures will Viet Nam take to allow the Khmer-Krom people to freely practice Theravada Buddhism without forced alignment with the Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), by their right to religious autonomy and freedom of belief as guaranteed under Article 18 of the ICCPR?
- How will Viet Nam ensure that Khmer-Krom monks and activists are not subject to threats, harassment, or intimidation for practicing their religion outside the state-controlled system and that they have the right to establish independent religious organizations and maintain their religious practices freely without interference or fear of persecution?

Article 19: Freedom of Opinion and Expression

In Paragraph 90 of Viet Nam's Report, the government claims that freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to information are central to the state's policies. However, the reality for Khmer-Krom activists paints a starkly different picture. When Khmer-Krom activists like Dinh Thi Huynh, Danh Minh Quang, To Hoang Chuong, and Thach Cuong advocated for their indigenous rights by distributing UN documents such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) or by organizing peaceful events like International Women's Day, they were arrested and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 2 to 4 years under the vague accusation of "abusing democratic freedoms". These charges have been routinely used to suppress freedom of expression and political dissent, making it clear that freedom of speech is not truly respected in Viet Nam.

The Khmer-Krom activists were exercising their right to freedom of expression, which is guaranteed under Article 19 of the ICCPR, yet their peaceful efforts to promote indigenous rights were criminalized. The vague nature of the accusations against them reflects the systemic repression of free speech in Viet Nam, where activism related to human rights or cultural preservation is often met with harsh penalties and intimidation. Additionally, the Viet Nameese government's control over media further undermines the freedom of the press and the right to information. In Paragraph 91, Viet Nam states that as of December 30, 2022, it has six major multimedia agencies. However, all independent media in Viet Nam is effectively controlled by the government and used as a tool for state propaganda, leaving no room for independent reporting or critical coverage of the government's actions.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- What specific measures will Viet Nam take to guarantee freedom of speech and the right to peaceful assembly, especially for Khmer-Krom activists advocating for their indigenous rights, and ensure that individuals are not arrested or sentenced for peacefully expressing their views, in line with Article 19 of the ICCPR?
- Given the government's control over the media, what steps will Viet Nam take to promote a free and independent press that allows Khmer-Krom activists and others to express their opinions without fear of retaliation or imprisonment, in line with Article 19 of the ICCPR and the right to access independent information?

Article 21 & 22: Right to peaceful assembly; freedom of association and to join a trade union

Viet Nam's Report (Paragraphs 100, 103, and 104) claims that all individuals are equal before the law and have the right to peaceful assembly and association, as guaranteed by the 2013 Constitution. However, this assertion is inconsistent with the experiences of Khmer-Krom individuals and activists. While Viet Nam reports having over 93,000 associations, including 584 nationwide organizations, these associations are mainly Government Organized NGOs (GONGOs) controlled and directed by the government to support state policies and praise the government's actions at international forums, including the United Nations. These GONGOs do not represent the interests or advocacy of marginalized groups, including the Khmer-Krom community.

The Khmer-Krom people, who have a longstanding cultural and historical presence in the Mekong Delta, do not have an independent association that operates freely to represent their religious, cultural, or political rights. For example, Khmer-Krom youths who have migrated to urban centers to work for Viet Nameese companies are denied the right to form independent trade unions to protect their labor rights, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation without a collective voice. Moreover, Viet Nam has not ratified the ILO Convention No. 169, which would ensure indigenous peoples' rights to form independent unions and associations. This lack of support for independent Khmer-Krom associations and the absence of legal protections for labor rights underlines the systemic discrimination and lack of freedom faced by Khmer-Krom individuals.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- What steps will Viet Nam take to allow the Khmer-Krom community to establish independent associations and trade unions that can advocate for their rights and interests, including the freedom to organize without interference from government-controlled bodies, in line with the right to freedom of association guaranteed under Article 22 of the ICCPR?

- How will Viet Nam address the lack of labor rights protection for Khmer-Krom workers, particularly those working in urban areas, and ensure the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 to recognize the labor rights of indigenous communities, including the Khmer-Krom, in accordance with international labor standards?

Article 25: Right to participate in public affairs, to vote and to be elected and access to public service

Viet Nam's Report (Paragraph 119) asserts that all Viet Nameese citizens have the constitutional right to actively participate in the country's political, economic, and social life, contributing to implementing policies and laws. However, this claim does not align with the reality experienced by the Khmer-Krom people living in Viet Nam. The Khmer-Krom, especially those in rural areas, live in a one-party state under the control of the Communist Party, where genuine political participation is limited.

While Khmer-Krom individuals are formally encouraged to vote during national elections, the electoral process is not free, fair, or democratic. The Communist Party nominates the candidates, and there is no real competition for office. The Khmer-Krom people know that their votes are not counted meaningfully, and they are often compelled to participate in the elections despite knowing that their participation does not influence the outcome. Non-compliance or refusal to vote could lead to reprisals or trouble with authorities. This undermines the right to participate in public affairs and raises serious concerns about the lack of democratic rights for the Khmer-Krom people. Furthermore, while a few Khmer-Krom individuals have been elected to represent their communities in the National Assembly or have held positions within the government, these representatives do not genuinely serve the interests of the Khmer-Krom people. Instead, they are often used as instruments of state control to suppress Khmer-Krom rights, making it clear that these individuals are not truly representative of their communities.

The Khmer-Krom people are effectively excluded from meaningful participation in the political life of Viet Nam, as the state-controlled electoral process offers no room for political competition or genuine representation. This reflects a systematic denial of the political rights of the Khmer-Krom, denying them the opportunity to engage in a true democratic process.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- How will Viet Nam ensure that Khmer-Krom citizens can genuinely participate in the political process, including the right to vote freely for candidates of their choice, and ensure that elections are free, fair, and competitive?
- What concrete steps will Viet Nam take to ensure that Khmer-Krom individuals in positions of power genuinely represent the interests of the Khmer-Krom people rather than serving as instruments of state oppression and that these individuals can freely advocate for their community's rights without fear of retaliation or coercion?

Article 27: Right for Members of Ethnic, Religious, or Linguistic Minorities to Enjoy their Culture, Practice their Religion, and Use Their Language

Viet Nam's Report (Paragraphs 237-240) claims that Viet Nam respects the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, including their right to enjoy their culture, practice their religion, and use their language. While Viet Nam makes such claims, the Khmer-Krom people continue to face severe restrictions on these fundamental rights. The Khmer-Krom language, religion, and culture are consistently suppressed through government policies that aim to undermine their identity and assimilate them into the dominant Viet Nameese culture.

For example, the Khmer-Krom language is not freely taught in public schools or used in public life. Although, in recent years, Viet Nam has allowed some limited instruction of the Khmer language in schools, these efforts are insufficient. Khmer-Krom children may only learn their native language for a few hours per week at most, which is inadequate for developing fluency in the language. As a result, many Khmer-Krom youths can no longer read or write in Khmer fluently. This undermines their cultural identity, making passing on their traditions and language to future generations more difficult. Additionally, Khmer-Krom monks, such as Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra, Venerable Duong Khai, Venerable Thach Quy Lay, Venerable Kim Sa Ruong, Venerable Thach Chop, have faced arrest and imprisonment simply for trying to teach the Khmer language, advocate for religious freedom and indigenous rights in their temples, further highlighting the government's efforts to suppress Khmer-Krom cultural and linguistic rights.

When family members visit Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks or activists in prison, they are unjustly prohibited from speaking their native Khmer language. Instead, the Viet Nameese authorities force them to use Viet Nameese, effectively denying them the fundamental right to communicate in their own language. This restriction extends to phone calls as well, where the Khmer-Krom prisoners are forced to speak in Viet Nameese when reaching out to their families. This deliberate suppression of the Khmer language is a violation of their linguistic rights.

The Khmer-Krom people's right to practice their religion is also severely restricted. The Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), a state-controlled religious organization, dictates how Khmer-Krom Buddhists can practice their faith. This includes forcing Khmer-Krom monks to adhere to practices of the VBS. Furthermore, Khmer-Krom religious sites are frequently destroyed or subjected to state interference. For example, in April 2024, Viet Nameese authorities destroyed a Khmer-Krom religious hall in Vinh Long province, symbolizing the ongoing suppression of Khmer-Krom religious practices.

Additionally, while Viet Nam claims that "ethnic minorities" (not recognizing them as indigenous peoples) enjoy the right to celebrate their culture, the Khmer-Krom community's cultural traditions are often exploited for economic profit. Traditional sports such as boat racing and ox racing, once central to Khmer-Krom cultural festivals, have been commercialized to attract tourism and generate profits for the government. The Khmer-Krom people receive little to

no benefit from these festivals and their traditional sports, which have now become commodified.

Furthermore, Khmer-Krom farmers in the Mekong Delta face economic challenges due to rising farming costs and the lack of access to vocational education, leading many Khmer-Krom youths to leave their ancestral lands searching for low-wage labor in cities. Even during traditional holidays such as Khmer New Year or Bonn Pjum Ben, Khmer-Krom workers are denied time off to celebrate their cultural festivals, as many work in factories or as servants in Viet Nameese households, making it clear that Khmer-Krom cultural practices are marginalized and disrespected.

Recommendation Questions for the Committee to Ask the State of Viet Nam:

- What steps will Viet Nam take to ensure the right of the Khmer-Krom people to freely practice their religion, teach their language, and preserve their culture without government interference or coercion?
- Why are Khmer-Krom prisoners, including Buddhist monks and activists, forced to communicate in Viet Nameese during family visits and phone calls, and what steps is the government taking to ensure that they can communicate in their native Khmer language?
- How will Viet Nam address the discriminatory policies that prevent Khmer-Krom communities from celebrating their traditional festivals and protecting their cultural practices, including the destruction of religious sites, the commercialization of cultural festivals, and the denial of time off for Khmer-Krom workers during major cultural holidays?

Conclusion

The Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) respectfully urges the members of the ICCPR Committee to use the information and recommendations in this report to hold the Viet Nameese delegation accountable and press for immediate, concrete actions to fully implement the ICCPR, regardless of the political system Viet Nam follows. As a state party to the ICCPR, Viet Nam has committed to upholding the human rights of all its citizens, including the Khmer-Krom people. It is essential that Viet Nam be held accountable for its failure to meet these obligations, particularly as Viet Nam serves as a member of the Human Rights Council and has expressed its intent to seek another term.

The Khmer-Krom people continue to endure systemic oppression and denial of their fundamental human rights, especially their indigenous and religious freedoms. In 2024, several Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists were arrested, detained, and sentenced to lengthy prison terms simply for advocating for their indigenous rights and religious freedoms. These individuals,

whose names and sentences are as follows, were subjected to unjust punishment for peacefully exercising their fundamental rights:

- Mrs. Dinh Thi Huynh: 2 years imprisonment
- Mr. Danh Minh Quang: 3 years and 6 months imprisonment
- Mr. To Hoang Chuong: 3 years and 6 months imprisonment
- Mr. Thach Cuong: 4 years imprisonment
- Venerable Thach Chanh Da Ra: 6 years imprisonment
- Venerable Duong Khai: 5 years, 9 months imprisonment
- Mr. Kim Khiem: 3 years imprisonment
- Mr. Thach Nha: 2 years, 6 months imprisonment
- Venerable Thach Quy Lay, Venerable Kim Sa Ruong, Venerable Thach Chop, Mr. Thach Ve Sanal, and Mr. Kim Khu: 2 years imprisonment each

On March 27, 2025, Venerable Kim Som Rinh, Thach Nga, and Thach Xuan Dong were unjustly arrested under the vague and politically charged accusation of “Abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights, and interests of organizations and/or citizens,” as stated in Article 331 of the Viet Nam Criminal Code. This arrest represents yet another troubling example of the Viet Nameese government’s relentless repression of the Khmer-Krom community. The individuals now face the threat of an unjust sentence, a pattern all too familiar, as Viet Nameese authorities have historically used such tactics against Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists in 2024.

These brave individuals were not involved in violent or unlawful actions. They advocated for the fundamental rights guaranteed under international law, including the ICCPR. Viet Nam’s actions of arresting, detaining, and imprisoning these activists reflect a blatant disregard for their freedom of expression, religious freedom, and cultural autonomy.

The Khmer-Krom people have demonstrated remarkable resilience and courage in pursuing freedom and self-determination, as enshrined in Article 1 of the ICCPR. Now, it is time for Viet Nam to uphold its ICCPR obligations and ensure the Khmer-Krom are granted the protection and justice they are rightfully owed. We call on the Committee members to demand that Viet Nam release all imprisoned Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks and activists, end the repression, and guarantee the right of the Khmer-Krom people to live freely, practice their religion, and preserve their cultural heritage without fear of reprisals.

This ICCPR cycle review is an opportunity to advocate for the human dignity of people who have been marginalized and oppressed for far too long. We implore the Committee members to ensure Viet Nam’s accountability and demand justice for the Khmer-Krom.