

July 18, 2012

To: Member states of ECOSOC

Re: Support for the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned group of civil society organizations from around the world, are writing to express our strong support for the special consultative status with the United Nations granted to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) and its right to exercise freedom of expression of its nonviolent view regarding the situation in Vietnam. We urge you, as a member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), to vote against the draft resolution to revoke KKF's special consultative status at the July 23 meeting of ECOSOC, and to support the ability of civil society organizations to freely participate in the work of the United Nations.

As you know, under ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations is mandated to grant consultative status to those organizations whose aims and purposes are in "conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations," and which "undertake to support the work of the United Nations and to promote knowledge of its principles and activities." We consider that the KKF fully meets these criteria.

Based in the United States and operating internationally, KKF is a reputable and prominent NGO whose mission is to seek "freedom, justice and the right to self determination for Khmer Krom people." KKF, which is an independent organization not affiliated with any political parties or groups, carries out its work through peaceful and lawful means wholly consistent with international law to promote and protect the human rights of the indigenous Khmer Krom in Vietnam.

KKF has been actively and effectively engaged in various UN mechanisms over the years, participating and submitting reports at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), EU Human Rights Commission, and governments, in addition to organizing various international events and conferences on human rights and indigenous issues.

Following a consensus decision by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations to grant special consultative status to KKF in May 2012, the government of Vietnam registered a protest against KKF's application, claiming that KKF is "unqualified for a consultative status with ECOSOC" and that it has carried out "politically motivated acts (...) undermining the national unity of the State of Viet Nam." In reality, the government of Vietnam's attempt to get KKF's consultative status revoked is a politically motivated attack against an independent, nonviolent civil society organization that advocates upholding and implementing universal human rights standards.

Regrettably, this is far from the only attempt by the government of Vietnam to silence those critical of it, including by increasingly denying dissenters their rights to free expression, association, and assembly. Bloggers, writers, human rights defenders, land rights activists, anti-corruption campaigners, and religious

and democracy advocates face escalating harassment, intimidation, arrest, torture, ill-treatment and imprisonment. Since 2004, Vietnam has severely restricted internet freedom by firewalling critical websites, and it is now threatening to even more severely restrict internet freedom.

The government of Vietnam has recently indicated its intentions to run for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. As a first step to show its commitment to human rights principles, the government of Vietnam should end its brutal crackdown on dissent and end its criminalization of peaceful activists, including by dropping its efforts to get KKF's ECOSOC status revoked. Unless it does so, it will not be able to fulfill the membership criteria of upholding the highest human rights standards and cooperating with the council. In particular, its attack on the KKF puts it totally at odds with the oft-stated commitment of the council to cooperate with NGOs and civil society in exercising and defending human rights.

Supporting the legitimate status of the KKF as an accredited NGO will not only benefit the work of the UN in accordance with its founding and fundamental principles, but it will also provide tangible evidence that your country supports the important work of civil society and human rights defenders in the Asia region and beyond. We reiterate our support for KKF and its work on human rights in Vietnam, and urge your state to oppose the draft resolution that would revoke KKF's special consultative status with ECOSOC.

With highest regards,

1. African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
2. African Democracy Forum (ADF)
3. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
4. Asian Legal Resource Centre
5. Christian Solidarity Worldwide
6. East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP)
7. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
8. Human Rights Watch
9. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
10. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
11. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
12. Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA)
13. West African Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN)
14. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)