



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Stichting Global Human Rights Defence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Unmasking the Struggles for the Fundamental Rights of the Khmer-Krom People in Viet Nam**

Viet Nam's recent appointment to the Human Rights Council for the 2023-2025 term carries the weighty responsibility of upholding ratified international treaties and legal jurisdictions. However, a stark contrast between theory and reality becomes evident. Despite a well-defined legal framework on paper, the actual situation for minorities and indigenous communities presents a distressing picture. This landscape is marked by unfounded accusations, deplorable mistreatment, and an unsettling trend where coerced confessions determine their release.

Strikingly, Viet Nam avoids recognizing these groups as indigenous, instead labeling them as 'minorities.' One prominent example is the Khmer-Krom people residing in the Mekong Delta. A troubling pattern emerges as the Vietnamese government systematically rejects the Khmer-Krom's self-identification, categorizing them as ethnic minority status. This campaign aims to erase their unique heritage, portraying them as Khmer immigrants from Cambodia. Equally alarming is the imposed limitation on their use of the Khmer language and mentioning their geographical Khmer names in public records and media. This linguistic suppression even extends to school curricula, with limited hours allocated to teaching Khmer, their cultural essence. Khmer Buddhist temples attempt to counter this erosion by offering Khmer language classes, yet these efforts remain under government scrutiny. Religion, an integral facet of identity, faces similar jeopardy. Independent associations such as the Khmer-Krom Buddhist organization are proscribed, effectively coercing adherence to the government-controlled Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha. Basic religious practices and monk ordination now fall under this control, casting a shadow over their spiritual pursuits.

The paradox deepens when considering Viet Nam's endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which contradicts the reality on the ground. Dissent is stifled, with local authorities going so far as to detain human rights advocates committed to educating their community about UNDRIP. A case in point are Khmer-Krom activists Thach Cuong, To Hoang Chuong, and Danh Minh Quang were apprehended for disseminating UN documents and organizing human rights events. These activists, affiliated with the Khmer-Krom group, played critical roles in empowering their community by providing vital information and sparking discussions on international human rights. Suppressing these voices perpetuates an insidious cycle of marginalization.

In conclusion, a strong plea is directed at the Human Rights Council to hold Viet Nam accountable for its policies and actions, ensuring adherence to UNDRIP principles. The council is urged to support the Special Rapporteur of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) in conducting an investigative visit to Viet Nam. By maintaining its impartiality, the council has the opportunity to guide Viet Nam toward fostering inclusivity and equity, aligning with the essence of human rights.

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