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FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE

Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) Condemns Vietnamese Kangaroo Court Sentencing of Khmer-Krom Activists in Tra Vinh Province

WASHINGTON, D.C., 20 March 2024 — The Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF) strongly denounces the recent sentencing of Khmer-Krom activists, Mr. To Hoang Chuong and Mr. Thach Cuong, by a court in Cau Ngang district, Tra Vinh province, Vietnam. Their prolonged detention without legal representation and subsequent imprisonment constitute a severe violation of their fundamental human rights.

The arrests of Mr. To Hoang Chuong and Mr. Thach Cuong on July 31, 2023, under the dubious pretext of "abusing democratic freedoms" (Article 331 of the Vietnamese Criminal Code), highlight the systematic suppression of dissent in Vietnam. Since their arrest, they have been unjustly denied the right to legal counsel.

Following over six months of detention, Vietnamese authorities conducted a hastily arranged trial on March 20, 2024, sentencing the activists without notifying their families. Upon learning of the trial, the families rushed to it but were barred entry by police. The closed-door proceedings involved only Vietnamese authorities posing as ordinary citizens. The activists were reportedly coerced into confessing to fabricated charges. Mr. To Hoang Chuong received a three-and-a-half-year sentence, while Mr. Thach Cuong was sentenced to four years.

These individuals were steadfast advocates for their community's indigenous rights. They tirelessly promoted causes such as the distribution of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and participated in events like International Human Rights Day and International Women's Day. Instead of recognition for their dedication to using their right to freedom of expression, the Vietnamese government used this so-called "kangaroo court" to silence them, seemingly as a tactic to assimilate and diminish their indigenous cultural identity.

The KKF urges the international community, including the esteemed bodies of the United Nations and nations engaged in human rights discussions with Vietnam, to intervene and advocate for the immediate release of Mr. To Hoang Chuong and Mr. Thach Cuong and the other two Khmer-Krom activists, Mrs. Dinh Thi Huynh and Mr. Danh Minh Quang who were also sentenced unjustly in February.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, Vietnam is responsible for upholding human rights principles and abandoning unfair trials. We demand that the Khmer-Krom activists' voices be heard and that justice and human rights prevail.

