

Cambodian Consulate in VN To Probe Monk's Case

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Information Minister and government spokesman Khieu Kanharith said Monday that he had personally requested that Cambodia's consulate in Ho Chi Minh City look into the case against imprisoned Khmer Krom monk Tim Sakhorn.

Tim Sakhorn, who was chief of Phnom Den pagoda in Takeo province's Kiri Vong district, disappeared on June 30—the same day he was defrocked for allegedly damaging relations with Vietnam.

The Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh announced August 2 that the missing monk was being detained in Vietnam and will be tried for political crimes resulting from his allegedly assisting the US-based Khmer Kampuchea Krom Federation. "I contacted the Cambodian consulate to inquire about the charge [against Tim Sakhorn],"

Khieu Kanharith said, adding that he was waiting for the consulate to get back to him after investigating the matter.

Thach Setha, executive director of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Community, sent a letter to Prime Minister Hun Sen on Monday asking for his intervention in the Tim Sakhorn case. "We would like Samdech [Hun Sen] to get the government of Vietnam to allow family members and NGOs to meet Tim Sakhorn in prison," the letter reads, adding a request for the prime minister to use whatever diplomatic means are open to him to see the monk returned to Cambodia.

In response, Khieu Kanharith urged NGOs to visit Tim Sakhorn in prison if possible. He cautioned them, however, to remain silent if they are denied access to the jailed monk, claiming that an outcry by NGOs could impede the consulate's work.

Khieu Kanharith added that intervention by the Cambodian government was impossible if the case against Tim Sakhorn—who he said held both Cambodian and Vietnamese citizenship—was a criminal matter.

Trinh Ba Cam, spokesman for the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh, reiterated that Tim Sakhorn was arrested allegedly trying to enter Vietnam illegally. He added that there was no reason to return the monk to Cambodia because he was a Vietnamese citizen and had committed anti-Vietnamese crimes in both Cambodia and Vietnam.

The General Consulate of Cambodia in Ho Chi Minh City could not be reached at the number listed on the government's Web site. A receptionist at the Cambodian Embassy in Hanoi said that no one was available to speak with a reporter.