



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Treatment of Catholics in Vietnam

The *US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report* states in its introduction:

“The Constitution provides for freedom of worship; however, government restrictions remained on the organized activities of many religious groups.

Respect for religious freedom and practice continued to improve in some regards during the reporting period, though significant problems remained. The Government took further steps to implement its 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and supplemental decrees on religious policy issued in 2005 (collectively, the Government's "legal framework on religion"). The Government also facilitated construction of new training facilities, thus furthering the education of thousands of monks, priests, nuns, and pastors. New congregations were registered in many of the 64 provinces, a number of new religious groups were both recognized and registered at the national level, and the Government generally allowed citizens to practice religion more freely. The Catholic Church, Protestant congregations, and other smaller religious groups reported that their ability to gather and worship improved and that the Government eased restrictions on the assignment of new clergy. The Government also permitted Buddhists, Catholics, and Protestants to hold several large-scale religious services throughout the country, with more than 10,000 religious followers participating in each event. The Catholic Church reported the Government approved the establishment of one additional Catholic seminary in Nam Dinh Province. Protestants and Catholics across the north reported improvement in most officials' attitude toward their religion, and in general Protestants and Catholics were allowed to gather for worship without harassment, despite isolated incidents.” (US Department of State (26 October 2009) *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 - Vietnam*)

This report also states in the same section:

“Many Catholics and Protestants reported Christians are not considered for senior government positions because of unofficial discrimination within the Government.” (Ibid)

This report also states under the heading ‘Section I. Religious Demography’:

“The country has an area of 127,000 square miles and a population of 86 million. Some estimates suggest more than half of the population is at least nominally Buddhist. The Roman Catholic Church constitutes 8 to 10 percent. Several Cao Dai organizations constitute 1.5 to 3 percent, the primary Hoa Hao organization 1.5 to 4 percent, Protestant denominations 0.5 to 2 percent, and one Muslim

organization less than 0.1 percent of the population. Most other citizens consider themselves nonreligious, although some practice traditional beliefs such as veneration of ancestors and national heroes.” (Ibid)

This report also states under the same heading:

“There are an estimated 8 million Catholics, although government statistics place the number at 6.15 million. Catholics live throughout the country, with the largest concentrations in the southern provinces around Ho Chi Minh City, in parts of the Central Highlands, and in the provinces southeast of Hanoi. Catholicism has revived in many areas in recent years, with newly rebuilt or renovated churches and growing numbers of people who want to be religious workers.” (Ibid)

This report also states under the heading ‘Legal/Policy Framework’:

“The Government officially recognizes the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Baha'i, Muslim, Pure Land Buddhist Home Practice, Threefold Southern Tradition, and Threefold Enlightened Truth Path faiths as religious organizations. Individual congregations within each registered or recognized organization established after the legal framework took effect must also be registered.

[...]

The Government allows travel for religious purposes, but the approval of authorities is required for some religious leaders to participate in religious conferences and training courses abroad. Muslims were able to undertake the Hajj, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant officials were generally able to travel abroad for study and for conferences. Catholic leaders regularly travel to the Vatican for consultations. Other unofficial religious leaders regularly travel internationally.”

[...]

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; however, it permits clergy to teach at universities in subjects in which they are qualified. Buddhist monks have lectured at the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, the main Communist Party school. Several Catholic nuns and at least one Catholic priest teach at Ho Chi Minh City universities. They are not allowed to wear religious dress when they teach or to identify themselves as clergy. Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Buddhist groups are allowed to provide religious education to children. Catholic religious education, on weekends or evenings, is permitted in most areas and has increased in recent years in churches throughout the country.

[...]

Other obstacles to religious growth and training remained. Officially recognized religious groups faced some limitations in obtaining or publishing teaching materials, expanding training facilities, sharing their faith, building new houses of

worship, and expanding the number of clergy in religious training in response to increased demand from congregations. The Government continued to ease limitations compared to previous years, however.” (Ibid)

This report also states under the same section:

“The country's history, and its recent rapid economic development, complicate land issues. As in the case of the former Papal Nuncio site in Hanoi, there are claims by both Buddhists and Catholics because land once home to Buddhist pagodas was given to the Catholic Church during the French colonial period. Land is a valuable commodity, and the Government prioritizes rapid economic development. Religious leaders increasingly reported their land disputes were matters of economic rather than religious discrimination.

While the Government and the Catholic Church agreed to the return of one property in 2008, the status of many other properties remained unresolved. In June 2009 a Catholic monastery on disputed property belonging to the Brothers of the Holy Family in Long Xuyen, An Giang Province, was torn down.

In Quang Binh Province in February 2009, the bishop of the Vinh diocese celebrated Mass at the disputed ruins of the Tam Toa Church, which had been bombed in 1968. The provincial government seized the church in 1996 and converted it to a war memorial to "preserve and protect for future generations the memory of American War Crimes." On October 23, 2008, the bishop had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with provincial officials recognizing the historic value of the church and agreed to a land swap in exchange for suitable replacement property. When local authorities offered five parcels of land to build a new church, however, the diocese rejected the properties as not of comparable worth.

In January 2009 a disputed Catholic property in Vinh Long, the convent of the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Paul of Chartre, was torn down and converted into a public park.

Large-scale protests occurred in Hanoi, with as many as 15,000 Catholic parishioners attending a special Mass and prayer vigil conducted by the Archbishop of Hanoi on September 21, 2008, as the result of an ongoing property dispute over the residence of the former Papal Nuncio in Hanoi, which the Government confiscated. On September 19, city officials had announced they would turn the site into a public park, with the former Papal Nuncio's home becoming a library. City officials immediately began demolishing administrative buildings at the site.

Between January and September 2008, Catholic parishioners held large prayer vigils over disputed land the Thai Ha parish previously owned in Hanoi. Eight persons were arrested in August and September. In December they were sentenced to time served for destroying public property and disturbing public order.” (Ibid)

This report states under the heading ‘Abuses of Religious Freedom’:

“Catholics in Son La City faced regular harassment by local officials and police and were prohibited from holding Christmas Mass. Local officials also barred a visiting priest from holding Easter services, and only allowed him to pray with congregants.” (Ibid)

This report states under the heading ‘Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom’:

“Improvements in respect for religious freedom continued during the reporting period. In many areas Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai, as well as the Government, reported an increase in religious activity and observance. Compared to previous reporting periods, the Government continued to ease restrictions placed upon most religious groups and greatly expanded the number of religions that received national recognition.”

[...]

Thousands of new church leaders--Catholic, Buddhist and Protestant--were trained with Government sanction.” (Ibid)

[...]

During the reporting period, the Government permitted large religious gatherings, such as Catholic celebrations at the La Vang Catholic sanctuary, the funeral of Cardinal Tung in Hanoi where more than 5,000 participated, Christmas celebrations in Danang with 3,000 participants, and a large celebration of more than 10,000 for Vesak Day at a stadium in Ho Chi Minh City.

[...]

The Catholic Church reported continued easing of Government control over Church assignment of new clergy, and many new priests joined the seminary and were ordained. The Government no longer restricts the number of students who may enter seminary each year. The Catholic Church operated seven seminaries, with some 1,500 students enrolled, as well as a new special training program for "older" students. All students must be approved by local authorities to enroll in a seminary and must be registered prior to their ordination as priests, although the Church reported none of those who completed training were prohibited from ordination. Church authorities acknowledged that while the number of students being ordained remained insufficient to support the growing Catholic population, the Church lacked the internal capacity to open additional seminaries and enroll new students.

The Government granted permission for a new Catholic seminary to open in Nam Dinh Province, but due to a lack in capacity within the Church, the seminary did not open. In 2008 the Church opened a pastoral center in Ho Chi Minh City to train lay persons to serve as deacons and in other nonordained roles. Demand for theological studies exceeded expectations, and the center was at capacity.

The Government also continued to facilitate the continued education of hundreds of priests overseas. The Catholic Church estimated that Vietnam was third in the world in sending Catholic priests overseas, after the Philippines and India.

[...]

Despite protests surrounding land disputes, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Government continued to improve during the reporting period. Catholic leaders regularly travel to the Vatican for consultations. In June 2009 30 Catholic Bishops met with the Pope and presented a request for the Pope to visit Vietnam in 2010. The Government also continued to cooperate with the Catholic Church in nominations for bishops' appointments. For example, the Government expedited the ordination of three bishops in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Buon Ma Thuot. For the first time, Ha Giang provincial authorities also granted residency to a parish priest. In Moc Chau District in Son La Province, Catholics experienced fewer difficulties than in previous years and were allowed to conduct Easter and Christmas celebrations for 500 to 600 parishioners. They also reported a priest was allowed to conduct mass and give communion at an unregistered meeting point every other Saturday with more than 100 Catholics regularly in attendance. Similarly, authorities allowed a visiting priest to conduct Mass in Mai Son District on Palm Sunday.

On February 16-17, 2009, the Government and the Vatican held the first round of discussions in Hanoi under a newly created "Joint Vietnam-Holy See Working Group" on reestablishing diplomatic relations. The two sides issued a joint statement following their discussions noting the positive discussion and plans for future talks, and highlighting that "positive progress has been made in the religious life in Vietnam." After the formal discussions, the Vatican delegation, led by the Vatican Undersecretary for Relations with States, expressed his desire for the Pope to visit Vietnam by the end of 2010. The Government maintained its regular dialogue with the Vatican on a range of issues, such as diplomatic normalization, Church leadership, organizational activities, land issues, and interfaith dialogue. The Government also approved and worked with the Ford Foundation to sponsor a large exhibit on Catholicism at the National Ethnology Museum in Hanoi. The exhibit highlighted the religious life of practicing Catholics and asserted that "Catholic culture is an important part of the culture of Vietnam."

During the reporting period, a number of churches expanded their charitable efforts. After a 32-year hiatus, in October 2008 the Government reregistered Caritas Vietnam, a Catholic-affiliated nongovernmental organization whose operations focus on the needs of the disabled, orphans, ethnic minority and poor children; women, especially those living in poverty and victims of violence and of human trafficking; drug users; and persons living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. Catholic Relief Services also celebrated 15 years of operation in Vietnam in March 2009. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, the Catholic Church jointly with the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha supported HIV/AIDS hospices and treatment centers and counseling services to young persons. The Church also operated a shelter for HIV-positive mothers and HIV-infected children. During the second half of 2008, training courses to instruct Catholic priests, nuns, and lay people in the care of HIV/AIDS patients were launched in several Mekong Delta provinces. The Ho Chi Minh City government and the Catholic Church continued to discuss

how to officially approve new social work initiatives, such as official legal status to carry out its HIV/AIDS activities and management of an orphanage, while allowing the Church to pursue these initiatives quietly.” (Ibid)

The *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* has designated Vietnam a “country of particular concern” and reports:

“The government of Vietnam continues to control government-approved religious communities, severely restrict independent religious practice, and repress individuals and groups viewed as challenging political authority. Religious activity continues to grow in Vietnam and the government has made some important changes in the past decade in response to international attention, including its designation as a “country of particular concern” (CPC). Nevertheless, individuals continue to be imprisoned or detained for reasons related to their religious activity or religious freedom advocacy; police and government officials are not held fully accountable for abuses; independent religious activity remains illegal; legal protections for government-approved religious organizations are both vague and subject to arbitrary or discriminatory interpretations based on political factors; and new converts to some Protestant and Buddhist communities face discrimination and pressure to renounce their faith. In addition, improvements experienced by some religious communities are not experienced by others, including the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), independent Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Protestant groups, and some ethnic minority Protestants and Buddhists. Property disputes between the government and the Catholic Church continue to lead to harassment, property destruction, and violence, sometimes by ‘contract thugs’ hired by the government to break up peaceful prayer vigils.” (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (29 April 2010) *USCIRF Annual Report 2010 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam*, p.184)

This report also states:

“Despite significant restrictions and governmental interference, the number of religious adherents continues to grow in Vietnam. In large urban areas, the Vietnamese government continues to expand the zone of permissible religious activity for Catholics, non-UBCV Buddhists, some Protestant groups, and government approved Hoa Hao and Cao Dai communities, including allowing large religious gatherings and pilgrimages. Religious leaders in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City report fewer restrictions on their normal worship activities in recent years, and the government largely continues to support the building of religious venues and the training of religious leaders. Nevertheless, lingering property disputes over venues and facilities previously confiscated by the Communist government created serious tensions between Hanoi and some religious communities, leading to church demolitions, property confiscations, detentions, and societal violence.” (Ibid, p. 185)

This report also states under the heading ‘Catholics’:

“The relationship between the Vietnamese government and the Catholic church continues to be tense in some parts of Vietnam. Catholicism in Vietnam continues to grown rapidly and the church has expanded

both clerical training and charitable activities in recent years. However, in response to peaceful prayer vigils at properties formerly owned by the Catholic church, police have used tear gas and batons and detained participants. In addition, government officials have employed "contract thugs" to assault and intimidate Catholics attending prayer vigils.

Tensions escalated in January 2008 after Catholic parishioners conducted large-scale prayer vigils at the residence of the former papal nuncio in Hanoi that the government had confiscated in 1954. In February of that year, after the government promised to resolve the problem, the prayer vigils ceased. However, on September 19, 2008 city officials announced that they would turn two sites formerly owned by the Catholic church into public parks and make the former papal nuncio's home a library. City officials immediately began demolishing buildings on the site of the Papal Nuncio and the former Redemptorist monastery in Thai Ha parish. Large-scale protests followed, with as many as 15,000 Catholic parishioners attending a special mass and prayer vigil conducted by Archbishop Kiet on September 21, 2008. Police used violence to disband crowds at the two sites and used "contract thugs," some wearing the blue uniforms of the Communist Youth League, to harass and beat Catholic parishioners and vandalize churches. Eight individuals who participated in the vigils were arrested, and authorities detained and beat an American reporter covering the events.

The Hanoi People's Committee has called for the 'severe punishment' and removal of Archbishop Kiet and the transfer of four priests from the Thai Ha parish for 'inciting riots,' 'disrespecting the nation,' and 'breaking the law.' Catholic leaders in Hanoi have refused these demands and the Catholic Bishops Conference issued a public defense of the Archbishop and local priests, raising concerns about the government's commitment to religious freedom, the right of property, the government's control over the media, and other human rights issues.

On December 8, 2008 the eight individuals arrested for participating in the prayer vigils at the Thai Ha parish were tried jointly at the Dong Da People's Court in Hanoi and convicted of disturbing public order and destroying public property. Seven were given suspended sentences ranging from 12 to 15 months; of these, four were also sentenced to additional administrative probation ranging from 22 to 24 months. The eighth individual was given a warning. All were released with time served. The eight Catholics filed an appeal of the guilty verdict which was denied in April 2009.

Disputes over property continued in the past year. In July 2009, as many as 200,000 Catholics peacefully protested in Quang Binh province after police destroyed a temporary church structure erected near the ruins of the historic Tam Toa Church in Vinh Diocese. Police used tear gas and electric batons to beat parishioners who resisted, arresting 19, of whom seven were charged with disturbing public order. Charges are pending in this case.

In January 2010, an estimated 500 police and army engineers used explosives to blow up a crucifix at the cemetery of Hanoi's Dong Chiem Parish Church. Catholic laypeople that came to the site were held back

by police and several people were beaten for protesting the action. The government alleges that the crucifix was erected illegally. In February 2010, Catholic laypeople and nuns who traveled to the Dong Chiem site to join peaceful prayer vigils were assaulted, harassed, and in one case briefly detained by police. Reportedly, not all Vietnamese government officials condoned the destruction of the crucifix. The local government in Dong Chiem released a statement expressing disagreement with the action.

The government maintains veto power over appointments of bishops, but often cooperates with the Vatican in the appointment process. Catholic leaders in Ho Chi Minh City reported that they often move ahead with ordinations without seeking government approval. In 2007 two bishops and two priests were rejected because of inappropriate "family backgrounds." In 2009, the government approved three Vatican affiliated bishops in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Buon Ma Thuot. All students must be approved by local authorities before enrolling in a seminary and again prior to their ordination as priests, and the province of Thien-Hue restricted the number of seminarians. However, the government allowed a new Jesuit seminary to be built in Ho Chi Minh City and permitted several local dioceses to conduct religious education classes for minors on weekends and some sizeable medical and charitable activities.

During a May 2009 visit, a USCIRF delegation discovered severe restrictions on Catholic activities in Son La and Ha Giang provinces. In Son La, bishops and priests were restricted from traveling to dioceses in northwest Vietnam and provincial authorities refused to register a local Catholic diocese and mistreated lay Catholic leaders. Among ethnic minority Catholics in Ha Giang, some communities face pressure by authorities to renounce their faith. Following discussions by USCIRF with local officials, Catholics in Moc Chau District of Son La were able to celebrate Christmas and Easter last year and a priest is now allowed to give communion twice a month at a Catholic meeting point.

Despite evolving tensions between Catholics and the Vietnamese government in the past several years, Hanoi continues to discuss with the Holy See conditions for the normalization of relations and other issues of concern. In December 2009, President Nguyen Minh Triet met with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican. Hanoi hosted a visit from a high-level Vatican delegation in February 2009. The delegation announced that Pope Benedict hoped to visit Vietnam by the end of 2010." (Ibid, pp. 195-6)

Freedom House reports:

"During 2007 and 2008, over 20 individuals, including lawyers and Catholic priests, were sentenced to prison terms of up to eight years in what Human Rights Watch termed 'one of the worst crackdowns on peaceful dissidents in 20 years.'" (Freedom House (7 April 2010) *Countries at the Crossroads 2010 - Vietnam* p. 5)

This report also states:

"Citizens' ability to participate in religious activities has grown in recent

years, with an estimated 20 million citizens following a variety of religions... In 2008, the Catholic Church reported that the government had relaxed its control somewhat." (Freedom House (7 April 2010) *Countries at the Crossroads 2010 – Vietnam*, p. 10)

This report also states:

"As many as 15,000 Catholics participated in a special mass and prayer vigil over a property dispute in Hanoi in September 2008. The authorities used tear gas and electric batons to disperse the gathering and arrested at least eight participants." (Ibid, p. 12)

An *Amnesty International* document states:

"A Vietnamese human rights activist and Catholic priest who was temporarily allowed to leave detention on Monday should be unconditionally and permanently released, Amnesty International urged on Tuesday.

Father Nguyen Van Ly, who is serving an eight year jail term for spreading 'propaganda' against the state in 2007, was released for a period of 12 months on humanitarian grounds to receive medical treatment.

Ly, 63, has already served three years in prison. He is one of the founders of the internet-based pro-democracy movement 'Bloc 8406' and participated in banned political groups.

'Father Ly should never have been detained in the first place. His release should be unconditional and permanent and he should be allowed to receive proper medical care," said Amnesty International's Viet Nam researcher Brittis Edman. "This small positive step is happening against the backdrop of a deteriorating human rights situation, with 16 dissidents imprisoned in the last six months alone, and dozens more currently detained for criticism of government policies.'" (Amnesty International (16 March 2010) *Vietnamese Catholic priest should be unconditionally released*)

The *US Department of State Country Report* states under the heading 'Internet freedom':

"The government continued to use firewalls to block some Web sites that it deemed politically or culturally inappropriate, including sites affiliated with the Catholic Church, such as Vietcatholic.net and others operated by overseas Vietnamese political groups." (US Department of State (11 March 2010) *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Vietnam*)

This report states under the heading 'Freedom of Assembly':

"In July and August, large-scale prayer vigils occurred relating to a land dispute regarding the Tam Toa church ruins in Quang Binh Province. In July local authorities arrested eight parishioners in connection with the demonstrations; all had been released by September. A small mob attacked and beat two Catholic

priests near the disputed site. One of the priests was pushed from a second-story window and was hospitalized. The Tam Toa prayer vigils followed similarly large demonstrations and prayer vigils that took place in January, April, August, and September 2008 at disputed Catholic properties at the former papal nuncio's residence and at the Thai Ha parish in Hanoi. Smaller demonstrations by citizens demanding redress for land rights claims frequently took place in Ho Chi Minh City and occasionally in Hanoi. Police monitored these protests but generally did not disrupt them." (Ibid)

This report states under the heading 'Freedom of religion':

"The Catholic Church reported that the government continued to ease restrictions on assignment of new clergy and did not object to the installation of three new bishops during the year. The Church discussed establishing additional seminaries with the government and expanded its pastoral works program. On February 16-17, the government and the Vatican held their first round of discussions in Hanoi under a newly created "Joint Vietnam-Holy See Working Group" on reestablishing diplomatic relations. On December 11, State President Nguyen Minh Triet met with Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican for a meeting that the Vatican characterized as "a significant stage in the progress of bilateral relations with Vietnam."

A number of Catholic clergy reported a continued easing of government control over activities in certain dioceses outside of Hanoi. In many places local government officials allowed the Catholic Church to conduct religious education classes (outside regular school hours) and charitable activities. The Ho Chi Minh City government continued to facilitate certain charitable activities of the Church in combating HIV/AIDS; however, educational activities and legal permits for some Catholic charities to operate as NGOs remained suspended.

Local officials informally discouraged some clergy from traveling domestically, even within their own provinces, especially when travel to ethnic minority areas was involved. The Catholic archbishop of Hanoi was restricted in his official travels to ethnic minority areas in the north.

Despite some reports of discrimination against Catholic students, authorities denied that the government has a policy of limiting access to education based on religious belief." (Ibid)

The *Human Rights Watch* World Report 2010 states under the heading 'Freedom of Religion':

"In July as many as 200,000 Catholics peacefully protested in Quang Binh after police destroyed a temporary church structure erected near the ruins of an historic church. Police used teargas and electric batons to beat parishioners, arresting 19, of whom seven were charged with disturbing public order." (Human Rights Watch (20 January 2010) *World Report 2010 - Vietnam*)

This report also states under the heading 'Criminal Justice System':

“Lawyers representing political or religious activists face intense harassment and even arrest, such as Le Cong Dinh. In February 2009 police raided the office of Le Tran Luat, a lawyer defending Catholics arrested during 2008 prayer vigils in Hanoi. Authorities confiscated his computer and documents, blocked him from meeting his clients, and detained and interrogated him to pressure him to drop the case.” (Ibid)

An *Amnesty International* report from October 2008 states:

“After a violent crackdown in September 2008 on peaceful mass protests in Ha Noi, the capital, the Vietnamese authorities continue to threaten and otherwise intimidate Catholics who have supported for the church’s claims in a land dispute. The authorities have also launched a public campaign through the media – which is under strict state control – to discredit the Archbishop of Ha Noi, other church leaders and the protesters. Counterprotesters have subsequently gathered daily at the two sites in dispute, intimidating and hurling insults at parishioners, priests and observers, including calls such as ‘kill the archbishop’ and ‘kill the priests’. State-sponsored gangs have tacked at least one Catholic church outside Ha Noi, and discrimination against Catholics is growing. The peaceful protests and the subsequent crackdown take place amid severe restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, and long-standing discrimination against religious groups, including the Catholic Church.” (Amnesty International (October 2008) *Socialist Republic of Viet Nam - After the crackdown - attacks and intimidation*)

Another *Amnesty International* report from November 2008 states:

“In September 2008 police carried out a violent crackdown on peaceful mass protests in Ha Noi. Since December 2007, members of the Catholic Church there engaged in peaceful mass protests and prayer vigils to support the church’s claims to ownership of two pieces of land. During the crackdown police injured several people with their batons, and 20 people were hospitalised after teargas was used against protesters. At least eight people were arrested in the last wave of protests which began in mid-August; two of them remain in detention. Others, including senior church officials, remain at risk of arrest. Following the crackdown, the authorities continued to threaten and otherwise intimidate Catholics who supported the church’s claims. The government also failed to protect them against attacks, acts of intimidation and harassment by others, including state-sponsored gangs, even when police were present at the site. Reports of intimidation against Catholics increased in Ha Noi following the crackdown on Catholics and the public campaign against the protesters in the state-controlled mass media.” (Amnesty International (3 November 2008) *Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review*)

Freedom House report in their 2009 annual report:

“Religious freedom is still restricted, but the situation has improved in recent years due to international pressure and greater integration with the global

economy. All religious groups and most individual clergy members must join a party-controlled supervisory body. One such body exists for each religion that the state officially recognizes: Buddhism; Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; Islam; Cao Daiism, a synthesis of several religions; and the Hoa Hao faith, a reformist Buddhist church. Religious groups must obtain permission for most activities, including personnel decisions and building renovations. A small number of religious leaders and adherents remain in prison or face other forms of government harassment. In recent years, the Catholic Church has been allowed to select its own new bishops and priests, although they must still be approved by the government, and clergy members have enjoyed greater freedom to travel both domestically and internationally.” (Freedom House (16 July 2009) *Freedom in the World 2009 – Vietnam*)

A report from *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* states:

“A prominent Catholic priest was released from prison in Hanoi yesterday after three years in solitary confinement. The sixty-three year old Priest has suffered two strokes in jail, leaving him partially paralyzed.

His release follows a sustained international campaign on his behalf, in which Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was involved. The campaign was led by the US-based legal advocacy group, Freedom Now and included a statement last July by 37 US Senators calling on the President of Vietnam to free Father Nguyen Van Ly. Despite little obvious movement on the case in recent months, news of the release was reported in the early hours of Monday morning.” (Christian Solidarity Worldwide (16 March 2010) *Vietnam frees Catholic priest and human rights defender: Father Nguyen Van Ly*)

Another report from *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* states:

“Catholics have carried out mass demonstrations in Vietnam this week, against a violent police clampdown on a protest over a disputed site. Among the casualties was a priest, now in a coma, who was beaten and thrown from the second floor of a hospital by gangs allegedly acting on police instructions.

The *Catholic News Agency* reported that armed police attacked a group of priests and lay people, arresting seven, on 20 July as they tried to erect a cross and altar at the ruins of Tam Toa Church in the coastal city of Dong Hoi. Police reportedly used stun guns, tear gas and batons.” (Christian Solidarity Worldwide (30 July 2009) *Vietnam - Priest beaten and thrown from hospital window, as Catholics protest police violence*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources consulted

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