



Home Office

Country Information and Guidance

Vietnam: Religious minority groups

December 2014

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Preface

This document provides guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling claims made by nationals/residents of – as well as country of origin information (COI) about – Vietnam. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the guidance contained with this document; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies. Within this instruction, links to specific guidance are those on the Home Office’s internal system. Public versions of these documents are available at <https://www.gov.uk/immigrationoperational-guidance/asylum-policy>.

Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, [Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please [e-mail us](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy.

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Section 1: Guidance

Date updated: 14 November 2014

1.1 Basis of Claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of ill-treatment or harm amounting to persecution at the hands of the Vietnamese authorities due to a person's religious beliefs.

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1.2 Summary of Issues

- ▶ Is the person's account a credible one?
- ▶ Are members of religious groups at risk of ill-treatment or harm amounting to persecution in Vietnam?

- ▶ Are those at risk able to seek effective protection?
- ▶ Are those at risk able to internally relocate within Vietnam?

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1.3 Consideration of Issues

Is the person's account a credible one?

1.3.1 Decision makers must consider whether the material facts relating to the person's account of their membership of a religious group and of their experiences as such is reasonably detailed, internally consistent (e.g. oral testimony, written statements) as well as being externally credible (i.e. consistent with generally known facts and the country information). Decision makers should take into account all mitigating reasons why a person is inconsistent or unable to provide details of material facts such as age; gender; mental or emotional trauma; fear and/or mistrust of authorities; education, feelings of shame; painful memories, particularly those of a sexual nature, and cultural implications.

See also:

- ▶ [Country Information](#)
- ▶ Asylum Instruction on [Considering Protection \(Asylum\) Claims and Assessing Credibility](#)

Claims based on membership of minority religions often overlap with claims based on membership of minority ethnic grounds and/or opposition to the government. Decision makers should therefore also refer to Country Information and Guidance on:

- ▶ [Vietnam: Minority ethnic groups](#)
- ▶ [Vietnam: Opposition to the government](#)

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Are members of religious groups at risk of ill-treatment or harm amounting to persecution in Vietnam?

- 1.3.2 The constitution allows for religious freedom, but in practice the government restricts this right. The government has registered an increased number of religious groups and generally respects the religious freedom of those registered groups, as long as they comply with regulations. In spite of some improvements in recent years, there are ongoing problems with regard religious freedom.
- 1.3.3 The government restricts activities by independent religious groups and of individuals who are regarded as a threat to the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) especially those involved in religious freedom advocacy. Many unregistered religious groups report abuses, with a particularly high number of reports coming from the Central and Northwest Highlands.

- 1.3.4 A specialised religious police force is utilised to enforce vaguely defined national security laws and suppress independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai activities. Reports of increased tensions with the Catholic Church have emerged as the authorities seek to stop the growth of ethnic minority Protestantism and Catholicism through discrimination, violence and forced renunciations of their faith despite the practice of forced renunciations of faith being officially banned by Decree 22 in 2004.
- 1.3.5 In January 2013, Decree 92 into effect which further extended controls on religious groups. Unrecognised religious organisations must register their places of worship, but this only allows the privilege to operate in the administrative locality. Religious groups that operate outside of official, government-registered and government-controlled religious institutions are subjected to monitoring, intimidation, harassment and sometimes violent enforcement by the authorities.
- 1.3.6 In general the restrictions placed on members of registered religious groups are not sufficient to warrant international protection. Persons associated with unregistered religious groups, particularly members of independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai groups generally face more difficulties and restrictions on religious freedom than members of registered communities. The levels of ill-treatment suffered will vary depending on region, ethnicity, involvement if any in religious freedom advocacy and whether the person is perceived to be politically active against the government. Each case must be assessed on its own merits taking full account of the particular circumstances and profile of the person and any past persecution.

See also:

- ▶ [Country Information](#)
- ▶ Asylum Instruction on [Considering Protection \(Asylum\) Claims and Assessing Credibility](#)

See also Country Information and Guidance on:

- ▶ [Vietnam: Minority ethnic groups](#)
- ▶ [Vietnam: Opposition to the government](#)

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Are those at risk able to seek effective protection?

- 1.3.7 As this category of claim concerns a person's fear of ill treatment by the state authorities, they would be unable to apply to those authorities for protection.

Are those at risk able to internally relocate within Vietnam?

- 1.3.08 The law allows for freedom of internal movement, although certain persons/groups are limited through government imposed controls. Local police require citizens to register when staying overnight in any location outside of their own homes and the government appear to enforce these requirements more strictly in some Central and Northern Highlands districts. Those who violate the regulations residency are subject to fines. There is regular migration from rural areas to cities. Moving without permission,

however, hampers persons seeking legal residence permits, public education, and health-care benefits.

1.3.09 Where the person's fear of ill treatment is by the national state authorities, relocation to a different area of the country to escape this threat is unlikely to be relevant or reasonable. However where members of religious minority groups do encounter localised hostility they may be able to avoid this by moving elsewhere in Vietnam, but only if the risk is not present there and if it would not be unduly harsh to expect them to do so.

See also:

- ▶ [Country Information](#)
- ▶ Asylum Instructions on [Internal Relocation](#)

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1.4 Policy Summary

- **The constitution allows for religious freedom, but the authorities control religious groups and those operating outside this authority are subject to monitoring and close surveillance, intimidation, harassment and sometimes violent enforcement.**
- **Persons associated with unregistered religious groups, particularly members of independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai groups generally face more difficulties and restrictions on religious freedom than members of registered communities. The levels of ill-treatment suffered will vary depending on the individual facts of the case, in particular: the region, ethnicity and whether the person is perceived to be politically active against the government.**
- **Ethnic minority Protestants continue to experience some of the harshest treatment by local authorities.**
- **Where persons who promote religious freedom or are otherwise involved in activities which are perceived by the government to advocate separatism are likely to come to the attention of the authorities, they may face a real risk of persecution. In these cases a grant of asylum may be appropriate, depending on the individual circumstances and profile of the person.**
- **Where a claim falls to be refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.**

See also the Asylum Instruction(s) on:

- ▶ [Non-Suspensive Appeals: Certification Under Section 94 of the NIA Act 2002](#)
- ▶ [Humanitarian Protection](#)
- ▶ [Discretionary Leave](#)

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Section 2: Information

Claims based on religious minority groups often overlap with claims based on opposition to the government membership and/or minority religion grounds. Decision makers should therefore also refer to Country Information and Guidance on:

- ▶ [Vietnam: Ethnic Minority Groups](#)
- ▶ [Vietnam: Opposition to the Government](#)

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 The US State Department's 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014, stated:

'The US government estimates the total population at 92.5 million (July 2013 estimate). More than half of the population is Buddhist, with the overwhelming majority of those Buddhists (most of whom are of the majority ethnic group Kinh or Viet) practicing Mahayana Buddhism. Approximately 1.2 percent of the population, or about one million people, almost all from the Khmer ethnic minority group, practices Theravada Buddhism. Roman Catholics constitute 7 percent of the population. Catholicism is growing, with over 6 million adherents in 26 dioceses across the country. Cao Dai, a religion combining elements of many religions, is practiced by 2.5 to 4 percent of the population. Hoa Hao followers constitute 1.5 to 3 percent of the population. Estimates of the number of Protestants range from 1 to 2 percent of the population. Some Protestant denominations are officially recognized at the national level; others are registered locally.

'Smaller religious groups that together comprise less than 0.1 percent of the population include 50,000 ethnic Cham, who mostly practice a devotional form of Hinduism in the south-central coastal area; 70,000 to 80,000 Muslims scattered throughout the country (approximately 40 percent are Sunnis; the remaining 60 percent practice Bani Islam); an estimated 8,000 members of the Bahai Faith; and approximately 1,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There is one Jewish synagogue in Ho Chi Minh City serving approximately 150 Jews, mainly foreign residents who live in the city.

'Other citizens consider themselves nonreligious, or practice animism or the veneration of ancestors, tutelary and protective saints, national heroes, or local, respected persons. Followers of these traditional forms of worship may or may not term themselves religious.'

'The government recognizes 37 religious organizations affiliated with 11 recognized religions. The 11 recognized religions are: Buddhism, Islam, the Bahai Faith, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, the Pure Land Buddhist Home Practice, the Four Debts of Gratitude, the Threefold Enlightened Truth Path, and the Threefold Southern Tradition. Individual denominations within these recognized groups also must be registered. Some Buddhist, Protestant, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao groups do not

participate in government-recognized or government-registered religious organizations.’¹

2.1.2 The same report further noted that, ‘Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 14 percent of the population. Based on adherents’ estimates, two-thirds of Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including groups in the Northwest Highlands (H’mong, Dzao, Thai, and others) and in the Central Highlands (Ede, Jarai, Sedang, and M’ngong, among others). The Khmer Krom ethnic group overwhelmingly practices Theravada Buddhism.’²

2.1.3 The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief provided the following overview in a July 2014 press statement:

‘Viet Nam is home to a broad variety of religions and beliefs. The Government Committee on Religious Affairs informed me that there are currently 37 registered religious organizations in the country. According to the official statistics presented by the Government, the overall number of followers of recognized religions is about 24 million out of a population of almost 90 million. Formally recognized religious communities include 11 million Buddhists, 6.2 million Catholics, 1.4 million Protestants, 4.4 million Cao Dai followers, 1.3 million Hoa Hao Buddhists as well as 75,000 Muslims, 7000 Baha’is, 1500 Hindus and others. The official number of places of worship comprises 26,387 pagodas, temples, churches and other religious facilities. Viet Nam takes pride in having hosted international conferences of religious leaders, in particular United Nation Day of Vesak, a summit of Buddhist dignitaries which took place in May 2014. I was also informed that the people of Viet Nam comprise 54 different ethnic groups. Ethnic minority status and membership of a religious minority sometimes overlap.’

‘While the majority of Vietnamese do not belong to one of the officially recognized religious communities, they may nonetheless – occasionally or regularly – practise certain traditional rituals, usually referred to in Viet Nam under the term “belief”. Many of those traditional rituals express veneration of ancestors. Moreover, there is also a reality of religious faiths and practices outside of the officially recognized religious communities. To get a clear and comprehensive picture of this reality is difficult, if not impossible. Whereas some Government experts estimated the number of followers of non-registered communities to be very low, I also heard conjectures that the number of people practising religions outside of registered communities – or wishing to do so – may be up to millions. Apart from very different estimates concerning numbers, I also received conflicting information with regard to the conditions under which people can enjoy their human right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.’

‘Many interlocutors emphasized the fact that the conditions for the exercise of religious freedom have generally improved in Viet Nam in comparison to the situation post-1975. This assessment was largely shared by representatives of religious communities who

¹ US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014, (Section I. Religious Demography),

acknowledged that, despite ongoing challenges, they now have generally more space for practising religion than in the past. At the same time, the conditions under which individuals or groups can practise their religion or belief are unpredictable and often depend on good will of Government agencies, not least the local authorities. Moreover, members of religious minorities without official recognition continue to face enormous difficulties in exercising their rights to freedom of religion or belief, especially where their

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 23 October 2014

² The US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014, (Section I. Religious Demography),

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 23 October 2014

religious practices or rituals are considered not to match the “legitimate interests of the majority” – a phrase often invoked in some of the discussions.’²

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2.2 Religious freedom

2.2.1 Article 70 of the Constitution states that:

‘The citizen shall enjoy freedom of belief and of religion; he can follow any religion or follow none. All religions are equal before the law.

‘The places of worship of all faiths and religions are protected by the law.

‘No one can violate freedom of belief and of religion; nor can anyone misuse beliefs and religions to contravene the law and State policies.’³

2.2.2 The US State Department’s 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014, stated:

‘The constitution and other laws and policies provide for religious freedom but, in practice, the government restricted religious freedom. Many requests by religious groups for registration remained unanswered or were denied, usually at the provincial or village levels. Many unregistered religious groups reported abuses, with a particularly high number of reports coming from the Central and Northwest Highlands. These included allegations of beatings, arrests, detentions, and criminal convictions. The government, however, registered an increased number of religious groups and generally respected the religious freedom of those registered groups, to the extent the

² UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 31 July 2014

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E> date accessed 1 December 2014

³ Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Ministry of Justice's Portal, 1992 Constitution, 25 December 2001, http://moj.gov.vn/vbpq/en/Lists/Vn%20bn%20php%20lut/View_Detail.aspx?ItemID=10450, date accessed 23 October 2014.

groups complied with regulations. The government also permitted the expansion of charitable activities, and allowed large-scale worship services with more than 100,000 participants...

'The penal code establishes penalties for vaguely defined offenses such as "attempting to undermine national unity" by promoting "division between religious believers and nonbelievers." The government continues to limit the activities of unregistered religious groups and of individuals who are regarded as a threat to Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) authority. The 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and the revised Implementation Decree (Decree 92), which came into effect on January 1 [2013], serve as the primary documents governing religious practice. Both the ordinance and decree reiterate citizens' rights to freedom of belief and religion, but warn the "abuse" of freedom of belief or religion "to undermine the country's peace, independence, and unity" is illegal, and religious activities may be suspended if they "negatively affect the cultural traditions of the nation."... The government stated it continued to monitor the activities of certain religious groups because of their political activism. The government invoked national security and solidarity provisions in the constitution to override laws and regulations providing for religious freedom. This included impeding some religious gatherings and blocking attempts by religious groups to proselytize to certain ethnic groups in border regions deemed to be sensitive, as well as in the Central Highlands... 'Under the ordinance the government has control and oversight of religious organizations, which must be officially registered or recognized... There is no mechanism for appeal in the ordinance, and an official may deny requests for any reason... Religious believers, particularly members of organizations that had not applied for or been granted legal sanction, continued to report intimidation by local security officials about attending religious services. Harassment occurred in some cases when an organization attempted to upgrade its status by registering or applying for official recognition. In a number of instances, local officials forced church gatherings to disperse, advised or required groups to limit important celebrations in scope or content, closed unregistered house churches, and pressured individuals to renounce their religious beliefs...

'There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.'⁴

2.2.3 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam, 30 April 2014, stated:

'Despite some positive changes over the past decade, the Vietnamese government continues to imprison individuals for religious activity or religious freedom advocacy. It uses a specialized religious police force and vague national security laws to suppress independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai activities, and seeks to stop the growth of ethnic minority Protestantism and Catholicism via discrimination, violence, and forced renunciations of their faith. In the past year, arrests and confrontations with

⁴ 5 US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014, (Executive Summary), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 23 October 2014

the Catholic Church have escalated tensions.’ At least 100-200 prisoners of conscience are detained in Vietnam, some for their religious activity or religious freedom advocacy.⁵

2.2.4 Reporting on prisoners of conscience, including religious activists, Amnesty International noted that, ‘Some of those detained are in very poor health, in some cases exacerbated by harsh prison conditions and other ill-treatment.’⁷ In September 2014, Human Rights Watch released a report which highlighted ‘cases of killings in custody, alleged suicides, unexplained custodial deaths (including of previously healthy men in their 20s and 30s who allegedly died from illnesses), torture, and beatings.’⁸ In July 2014, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief noted in a press statement that, people with experiences of prison life alleged that religious practices are hardly accommodated in prisons; even the reception and possession of religious books or materials would usually be prohibited. This issue certainly deserves more attention.’⁹

2.2.5 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) World Report 2014: Vietnam, covering events of 2013, published 31 January 2014, stated:

‘In January 2013, the prime minister put Decree 92 into effect, further extending controls on religious groups. In its enforcement actions, the government monitors, harasses, and sometimes violently cracks down on religious groups that operate outside of official, government-registered and government-controlled religious institutions. Targets in 2013 included unrecognized branches of the Cao Dai church, the Hoa Hao Buddhist church, independent Protestant and Catholic house churches in the central highlands and elsewhere, Khmer Krom Buddhist temples, and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.’⁶

2.2.6 In July 2014, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief conducted a country visit of Vietnam, noted that:

‘The planned visits to An Giang, Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces were unfortunately interrupted from 28 to 30 July [2014]. I received credible information that some individuals whom I wanted to meet with had been either under heavy surveillance, warned, intimidated, harassed or prevented from travelling by the police. Even those who successfully met with me were not free from a certain degree of police surveillance or questioning. Moreover, I was closely monitored of my whereabouts by undeclared “security or police agents”, while the privacy and confidentiality of some meetings could

⁵ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam freedom (covering 31 January 2013 to 31 January 2014), 30 April 2014 (Key findings), http://www.refworld.org/publisher_USCIRF...5369e5b414.0.html, date accessed 23 October 2014 ⁷ Amnesty International, Restrictions on freedom of expression persist, scores of prisoners of conscience remain detained, 30 June 2014,

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA41/001/2014/en/5d9988ec-c96c-493c-921b0a64ec7ac3b5/asa410012014en.pdf>, date accessed 14 November 2014 ⁸ Human Rights Watch, Public Insecurity: Deaths in Custody and Police Brutality in Vietnam, 16 September 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/09/16/public-insecurity>, date accessed 14 November 2014 ⁹ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 31 July 2014

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E> date accessed 13 November 2014

⁶ Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Report 2014 (Events of 2013), 21 January 2014, p401, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2014_web_0.pdf, date accessed 6 October 2014

have been compromised. All these incidents are in clear violation of the terms of reference of any country visit.’⁷

2.2.7 The Special Rapporteur further stated that:

‘I have heard a number of serious allegations about concrete violations of freedom of religion or belief in Viet Nam. Reported violations include heavy-handed police raids; repeated invitations to “work sessions” with the police; close surveillance of religious activities; disruption of religious ceremonies and festivals; house arrests, at times over long periods; imprisonments, also sometimes over long periods; beatings and assaults; dismissals from employment; loss of social benefits; pressure exercised on family members; acts of vandalism; destructions of houses of worship, cemeteries and funeral sheds; confiscations of property; systematic pressure to give up certain religious activities and instead to operate within the official channels provided for religious practice; pressure to denounce one’s religion or belief. I also met with one prisoner of conscience in the prison in which he is currently detained. To different degrees, such allegations came from members of independent Buddhist communities, individuals belonging to various Protestants communities (some of which have been officially registered), some local groups of Catholics, followers of independent organizations of Cao Dai, followers of some new religious teachings, like Duong Van Minh, and others. As a result of pressure and persecution, some people have left or fled the country on religious grounds.’⁸

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2.3 Buddhism - Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam

This section should be read in conjunction with [section 2.4 on Hoa Hao](#) and information on Theravada Buddhists in section 2.6 on Khmer Krom of the Country Information and Guidance on [Vietnam: Minority ethnic groups](#).

2.3.1 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam, 30 April 2014, stated:

‘The largest Buddhist organization in the country, the UBCV [unsanctioned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam] refuses to join the state-sanctioned Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha. In the past year, partly in response to the election of new UBCV leaders, police have increased pressure. In January 2014 police in Hue forcibly stopped a planned UBCV commemoration ceremony, warning worshippers, beating a nun, and detaining over 15 monks. In February 2014, in Thua Thien-Hue province, police detained,

⁷ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 31 July 2014, (Introduction), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E> date accessed 13 November 2014

⁸ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 31 July 2014, (Reports about violations of freedom of religion or belief),

interrogated, and later restricted the movement of Le Cong Cau, head of the 500,000 member Buddhist Youth Movement. Cau was also detained briefly in March 2013 for posting articles supporting legal status for the UBCV. In February, in Ho Chi Minh City, police rammed the motorbike of and publicly beat monk Thich Chon Tam, a newlyelected member of the UBVC executive board.’¹³

2.3.2 In January 2014 Radio Free Asia (RFA) news reported that Thich Chon Tam, the newly appointed secretary general of UBCV’s Institute of the Sangha, was assaulted by Vietnamese plainclothes security agents as part of a greater crackdown on the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) following its announcement of a new executive committee, according to the UBCV-affiliated International Buddhist Information Bureau (IBIB) advocacy group. The RFA report stated:

‘IBIB said that police harassment of the monk was part of “an ongoing crackdown on members of the new UBCV executive” who, like Tam, were announced by Thich Quang Do earlier this month. It said that repression has been particularly harsh in Hue, the capital of Thua Thien-Hue province, where police prevented Thich Nhu Dat [the group’s newly appointed deputy leader] from organizing the UBCV commemoration service at the Long Quang pagoda on Jan. 10 [2014]. Dat told RFA’s Vietnamese Service last week that the government had actively prevented Buddhists from attending the ceremony beginning on Jan. 1 [2014], and had stepped up efforts from Jan. 7-9 [2014] in a number of different provinces...

‘Dat said that Buddhists near Long Quang pagoda were “invited” - a common euphemism for being forced against their will - to attend a lecture about how the UBCV is illegal and how joining it is in violation of the law. The lecture also referred to Dat as a “reactionary element” and warned the Buddhists in attendance that anybody who went to the commemoration service at Long Quang pagoda would be detained...

‘IBIB said Tuesday that since the crackdown began on Jan. 1, police had placed a total of 23 members of the UBCV-affiliated Buddhist Youth Movement (BYM) under house

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E> date accessed 13 November 2014

¹³ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam freedom (covering 31 January 2013 to 31 January 2014), 30 April 2014 (UBCV Buddhists), http://www.refworld.org/publisher_USCIRF...5369e5b414.0.html, date accessed 23 October 2014
arrest in Hue, including the group’s leader and newly appointed secretary general of the UBCV’s Executive Institute Le Cong Cau.’⁹

2.3.3 In July 2014, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief conducted a country visit of Vietnam and noted that:

‘During my meetings with representatives of independent Buddhist communities I heard complaints about ongoing repression, including police summons, house arrests, imprisonments and confiscation of property, which would prevent individuals from

⁹ Radio Free Asia, Vietnamese Security Agents Assault Monk of Banned Buddhist Church, 14 January 2014, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/assault-01142014175407.html>, date accessed 24 October 2014

exercizing their freedom of religion or belief in even a minimal way. Although I have not been able to make an appropriate and detailed analysis of all their complaints, which would require much more information from all concerned parties, the general attitude of delegitimizing non-official religious practices, which I have encountered in many conversations, are clear indicators that independent Buddhist communities currently cannot exercise their freedom of religion or belief.’¹⁰

2.3.4 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report for 2013 noted that:

‘The UBCV has faced decades of harassment and repression for seeking independence from the officially-approved Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha (VBS) and for appealing to the government to respect religious freedom and related human rights. Senior UBCV monks, including the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do, remain under some form of administrative probation or arrest in their home or pagoda... UBCV followers have been harassed and intimidated by the Religious Security Police, including threats of arrest, job loss, or expulsion of their children from school for continuing to frequent the pagoda or offer donations to “reactionary monks.” Laypeople affiliated with pagodas’ charitable activities, management committees, or the Buddhist Youth Movement are particularly targeted.’¹¹

2.3.5 The U.S. Department of State report on International Religious Freedom covering 2013 stated that:

‘The government continued to restrict the movement of UBCV leaders, although they were able to receive visits from foreign diplomats, visit other UBCV members, and maintain contact with associates overseas; however, government authorities closely monitored these activities. Provincial UBCV leaders throughout the southern region reported routine surveillance by local authorities. UBCV Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do stated authorities prevented followers from visiting him or regularly questioned them after any such visit, although he could meet diplomats within his pagoda. Authorities continued to ban the entry of Buddhist followers into UBCV pagodas.’¹⁷

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2.4 Hoa Hao

2.4.1 The website of the Vietnamese Embassy in Japan, described that, ‘Hoa Hao, also called Hoa Hao Buddhism, is another indigenous religion created in 1939 in Hoa Hao Village, Tan Chau District, An Giang Province. This religious sect is concentrated in the

¹⁰ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 31 July 2014, (Autonomy of religious and belief communities), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E> date accessed 13 November 2014

¹¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report 2013 Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (Prisoners of Conscience p.199 and UBCV p.201), [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf) date accessed 13 November 2014

Mekong River delta and its membership is estimated at about 1.2 million.’¹⁸

2.4.2 A Human Rights Watch (HRW) news report from December 2011 described the foundations of the Hoa Hao Buddhist sect:

‘Founded in 1939 by Huynh Phu So, Hoa Hao is a Buddhist sect based in the western Mekong delta. Some Hoa Hao adherents opposed the Republic of Vietnam in the mid 1950s as well as the communist insurgency throughout the Vietnam War. After 1975, the Hoa Hao sect was not recognized as an official religion by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. A section of the Hoa Hao church agreed to submit to state supervision and gained official recognition in 1999. But other Hoa Hao Buddhist factions remain at odds with the government.’ Adding that, ‘Unsanctioned Hoa Hao Buddhist groups have long been a target of government repression.’¹⁹

2.4.3 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2013 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam, 30 April 2013, stated: ‘The Vietnamese government continues to ban and actively discourage participation in independent factions of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, two religious traditions unique to Vietnam that claim memberships of four and three million, respectively. The repression of these groups includes interference with religious activities and leadership selection; loss of jobs, discrimination, and harassment of followers; and imprisonment of individuals who peacefully protest religious freedom restrictions.

‘The Vietnamese government requires that all Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups affiliate with the government-approved religious organizations, which oversee all pagodas, temples, educational institutes, and activities. Approval is required for all ordinations and ceremonies, donations, and expansions of religious venues. The government-approved leaders of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai organizations also vet the content of publications and religious studies curricula for schools.’²⁰

2.4.4 The USCIRF Annual Report 2013 further noted:

¹⁷ US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom Vietnam, 28 July 2014, (Section II. Government Practices)

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 12 November 2014

¹⁸ Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Japan, Religion and Beliefs, undated, <http://www.vietnamembassy-japan.org/en/nr070521170056/nr070821134630/>, date accessed 24 October 2014

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch (HRW), Vietnam: Release Hoa Hao Buddhist Activist, 12 December 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/12/12/vietnam-release-hoa-hao-buddhist-activist>, date accessed 24 October 2014

²⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report 2013 Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (p201-202 – Hoa Hao and Cao Dai),

[http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 24 October 2014

‘Independent groups, such as members of the Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church (HHCBC), face significant official repression, including disbanding under the new Decree 92 or arrest under national security provisions of the legal code. HHCBC leaders and their followers have been arrested and sentenced to terms of up to four years for staging hunger strikes, distributing the writings of their founding prophet,

holding ceremonies and holiday celebrations, or interfering as police tried to break up worship activities. HHCBC properties have been confiscated or destroyed and individual followers faced discrimination and loss of jobs. At least 12 HHCBC leaders remain imprisoned, including Mai Thi Dung, currently serving an 11-year prison term, who according to family members is gravely ill, with both feet paralyzed and suffering from heart disease.’¹²

- 2.4.5 The USCIRF Annual Report 2013 further noted: ‘Authorities continue to restrict celebrations of the Hoa Hao founder, who was killed by Communists Party members in 1949. In March 2012, authorities of An Giang, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, and Can Tho ordered surveillance of unsanctioned Hoa Hao monks. Police blocked roads, harassed or threatened followers and reportedly severely beat and arrested one follower.

‘In June 2012, authorities in Dong Thap province confiscated property used for worship services from the leader of an independent Hoa Hao congregation without compensation. Also in Dong Thap province, an HHCBC-affiliated worship site was disbanded after police threatened to arrest the leader, Tong Thiet Linh, and issued a heavy fine. Linh was told to affiliate with the government approved Hoa Hao organization.’²²

- 2.4.6 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam, 30 April 2014, stated: ‘Police raided the independent Hoa Hao Quang Minh Tu pagoda in An Giang province, beating followers and spraying raw sewage into the holy site. Leader Van Thanh Liem, previously jailed for leading a similar unsanctioned Hoa Hao group, slashed his stomach in protest of the attack. The pagoda remains closed and followers were told to attend the state-sanctioned Hoa Hao venue. In the past year, police in An Giang, Can Tho, Vinh Long, and Dong Thap provinces harassed independent Hoa Hao followers, barred them from worshipping, and prohibited public readings of founder Huynh Phu So's writings.’²³

- 2.4.7 The U.S. Department of State 2013 report on International Religious Freedom notes that:

‘Authorities in An Giang and Dong Thap provinces and Can Tho City continued to harass and abuse followers of the unsanctioned Traditional Hoa Hao Buddhist Church and Pure Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. In September [2012] a court tried and sentenced Hoa Hao follower Bui Van Tham to two years and six months in prison for public dissent from the

¹² 21 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report 2013 Countries of

Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (p202 – Hoa Hao and Cao Dai), [http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 24 October 2014 ²² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report on 2013 Countries of

Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (p202 – Hoa Hao and Cao Dai), [http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 24 October 2014 ²³ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, (USCIRF)

Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam freedom (covering 31 January 2013 to 31 January 2014), 30 April 2014 (Hoa Hao), <http://www.refworld.org/publisher,USCIRF,,,5369e5b414,0.html>, date accessed 23 October 2014

government and for organizing unsanctioned religious gatherings. Police had arrested Tham without a warrant in July 2012. In October 2012, police had arrested his father, Bui Van Trung, on the same charge, and a court sentenced him to four years in prison in January.’¹³

2.4.8 The Society for Threatened Peoples submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2014 that, ‘There is only one Hoa Hao group that is officially recognized by the government. Hoa Hao Buddhists of other independent communities are being threatened by harassment, discrimination, loss of jobs, restriction of celebrations, prohibition of public readings and raids. Followers were beaten, pagodas were shut down and properties have been confiscated or destroyed. Followers of independent groups like the Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church have been arrested and sentenced to terms of up to four years for staging hunger strikes, distributing the writings of their founding prophet, holding ceremonies and holiday celebrations, or interfering as police tried to break up worship activities.’²⁵ The Jubilee Campaign submitted that, ‘In some cases, public security agents and their hired thugs have surrounded Hoa Hao sites, beaten those attending meetings there and violently disrupted their meetings.’²⁶

2.4.9 Amnesty International reported that in August 2014, ‘Women activists Bui Thi Minh Hang and Nguyen Thi Thuy Quynh, along with their male co-defendant Nguyen Van Minh, were handed between two and three-year jail terms on charges of "disturbing public order" at Dong Thap Provincial People's Court in Viet Nam. Dozens of their supporters, including family members, bloggers and other civil society activists, were harassed, beaten and arrested to prevent them from attending the court hearing. [...] The three activists were attacked and arrested by police along with 18 others in February 2014 while trying to visit former prisoner of conscience Nguyen Bac Truyen at his fiancée's home.’²⁷ Human Rights Watch reported: ‘Nguyen Van Minh is an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist activist who has campaigned for freedom of religion and conscience. His wife, Bui Thi Diem Thuy, is also a religious activist whose father, Bui Van Trung, and brother, Bui Van Tham, are currently serving prison terms on politically motivated charges under article 257 of the criminal code for “resisting persons in the performance of their official duties.” Human Rights Watch believes they are being persecuted because they follow and support an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist group instead of joining the state-sanctioned one.’²⁸

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¹³ 24 US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom Vietnam, 28 July 2014, (Section II. Government Practices), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 12 November 2014 ²⁵ Society for Threatened Peoples, Written statement* submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, 4 June 2014, (p24), http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1403702993_g1404200.pdf, date accessed 13 November 2014 ²⁶ Jubilee Campaign, Written statement* submitted by the Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, 27 February 2014, http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1395162617_g1411453.pdf, date accessed 13 November 2014 ²⁷ Amnesty International, Viet Nam: Police beatings outside court amid crackdown on activism, 26 August 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/viet-nam-police-beatings-outside-court-amid-crackdown-activism-2014-08-26>, date accessed 13 November 2014 ²⁸ Human Rights Watch, Vietnam: Activists Face Trial on Bogus Traffic Offense, 24 August 2014,

2.5 Catholics

- 2.5.1 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2013 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam, 30 April 2013, stated: 'Catholicism continues to grow rapidly in Vietnam, and the church has expanded both clerical training and charitable activities in recent years. Hanoi and the Vatican continue to discuss resuming diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, the relationship between the Vietnamese government, some members of the Church's hierarchy, Catholic laity, and members of the Redemptorist Order continue to be tense. Over the past several years, including in the past year, Catholics have been detained for participating in peaceful prayer vigils and demonstrations at properties formerly owned by the Catholic Church. In addition, government officials have employed "contract thugs" to assault and intimidate Catholics from engaging in both private study and worship at "unregistered" locations.'²⁹
- 2.5.2 Cited cases where assault and intimidation against Catholics had been reported in 2012, in the USCIRF [report](#) (p203), included:
- 'Nghe An province has become a flashpoint of tensions between the Vietnamese government and Catholics. In March and May, five young Catholic activists – Vo Thi Thu Thuy, Nguyen Van Thanh, Dau Van Duong, Tran Huu Duc, and Chu Manh Son – were jailed for distributing pro-democracy leaflets. They all had begun their activism, blogging and conducting peaceful prayer vigils at disputed property of the Thai Ha parish in Hanoi.
- 'In June and July 2012, local authorities sought to prevent Catholic worship at private homes in Con Cuong and Quy Chau districts in Nghe An province. Unidentified groups of young men regularly gather to throw stones at worshipers and block roads to the sites, and officials reportedly have visited homes asking people to sign pledges not to "illegally celebrate Mass." On July 3, 2012 a mob beat several of those worshipping in Con Cuong, at least one severely. Catholics in Con Cuong have been frequent targets of abuse and intimidation in recent years.'³⁰
- 2.5.3 The HRW World Report 2014, stated, 'The January 2013 conviction and imprisonment of 14 mostly Catholic activists by the People's Court of Nghe An province initiated the year's upsurge of government attacks on critics. The vehicle this time was article 79 of the penal code, prohibiting activities aimed at "overthrowing the government," even

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/24/vietnam-activists-face-trial-bogus-traffic-offense>, date accessed 13 November 2014

²⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report 2013 Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (p203 – Catholics), [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 24 October 2014

³⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report 2013 Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (p203 – Catholics), [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 24 October 2014

though the 14 activists were exercising fundamental human rights, such as participating in volunteer church activities and peaceful political protests.’³¹

2.5.4 The USCIRF Annual Report 2014 stated that:

‘In July [2013], police arrested Ngo Van Khoi and Nguyen Van Hai, Catholics from the My Yen parish in Nghe An province. The two were reportedly seeking to repair or reopen a closed local shrine. A September prayer vigil for their release ended with police firing into the crowd, beating and injuring vigil participants, and detaining 15 people. The two men were convicted in October of “disturbing public order.” They were released in December after completing six months in detention.

‘In May [2013], eight ethnic minority Montagnard members of an independent Catholic movement were sentenced to between 3 and 11 years in prison for “undermining unity” and “sowing ethnic and religious hatred” for protesting against the relocation of their village in Gia Lai province [In the central highlands]. The Bishop of Kontum repeatedly has been denied access to the areas where the men reside.’³²

2.5.5 The Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2014 – Vietnam annual report, 22 August 2014, stated that, ‘Catholic leaders continued to be arrested around the country in 2013, and in September, Vietnamese authorities forcibly broke up a protest by Catholics in a town south of Hanoi, injuring at least 40 people.’³³ In September 2013, Radio Free Asia described the incident as ‘one of the bloodiest religious crackdowns in recent years in Vietnam’ reporting that police ‘fired multiple gunshots and lobbed grenades in front of a church and violently dispersed hundreds of Catholics demanding the release of two parishioners in a North Central Coast province.’³⁴

2.5.6 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom report for 2013 noted that:

‘A “religious police” unit (A41) continues to monitor “extremist” groups and a Special Task Force of the Mobile Intervention Police (Unit PA43) operates in the Central Highlands, assisting local police in detaining and interrogating suspected Dega Protestants or Ha Mon Catholics... Over the past year, police and local officials in Kontum and Dak Lak province continued their campaign to crack down on the growth of Ha Mon Catholics. At least three Ha Mon Catholics were arrested. The Catholic Bishop of Kontum, Michael Hoang Duc Oanh, has complained publicly and repeatedly that authorities intimidate ethnic minority Catholics and priests and block his visits to ethnic minority villages.’³⁵

³¹ Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Report 2014 (Events of 2013), 21 January 2014, p401, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2014_web_0.pdf, date accessed 6 October 2014 ³² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam freedom (covering 31 January 2013 to 31 January 2014), 30 April 2014 (Central highlands), <http://www.refworld.org/publisher,USCIRF,,5369e5b414,0.html>, date accessed 23 October 2014

³³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2014 - Vietnam, 22 August 2014, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/vietnam-0>, date accessed 24 October 2014 ³⁴ Radio Free Asia: Vietnamese Police Open Fire, Crack Down on Christian Protesters, 04 September 2013,

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/church-09042013193713.html>, date accessed 13 November 2014 ³⁵
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report 2013 Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (Central Highlands: Montagnard Protestants & Ha Mon Catholics, p204),
[http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 13 November 2014

2.5.7 The 2013 U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom report notes that ‘On July 31 [2013], a group of Catholics stated police beat them and removed them from the area in front of a church in Ho Chi Minh City as they were praying. The group had travelled to the church from other southern provinces to pray after their land and property had been seized by local authorities. Several followers reportedly required hospitalization due to the beatings.’ ¹⁴ In November 2013, the government sentenced four ethnic minority Montagnard members of the Ha Mon Catholic movement to between six months and nine years in prison for ‘undermining national unity’. ¹⁵

In October 2014, Dau Van Duong, 26, who was among four Catholic youths convicted in May 2012 of “conducting propaganda against the state” following distribution of prodemocracy leaflets was released after serving more than three years in prison. ¹⁶ He stated that he “nearly died from a beating and had suffered repeated humiliation by guards who denied him access to the Bible”. ³⁹

See also:

Country Information and Guidance on:

- ▶ [Vietnam: Minority ethnic groups](#) (Specifically Section 2.4: Degar / Montagnard and section 2.5: Hmong)

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2.6 Protestants

2.6.1 The US State Department’s 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014, stated that:

¹⁴ US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom Vietnam, 28 July 2014, (Section II. Government Practices).

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 12 November 2014

¹⁵ Society for Threatened Peoples, Written statement* submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, 4 June 2014, (p3), http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1403702993_g1404200.pdf, date accessed 13 November 2014

¹⁶ Radio Free Asia: Vietnamese Catholic Dissident Freed After More Than Three Years in Prison, 02 October 2014, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/release-10022014172717.html>, date accessed 13 November 2014 ³⁹

Radio Free Asia: Vietnamese Catholic Dissident Freed After More Than Three Years in Prison, 02 October 2014, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/release-10022014172717.html>, date accessed 13 November 2014

'Religious activities were often subject to the discretion of local officials. In some cases local officials reportedly told religious leaders national laws did not apply to their jurisdictions. Recognized and unrecognized Protestant groups were sometimes able to overcome local harassment or to overturn negative local decisions after they appealed to higher-level authorities... 'On March 19 [2013], members of a Protestant denomination in Danang reported police had dispersed a "meeting point" (or house church) of nearly 30 deaf followers and escorted them to a police station for questioning. The members, affiliated with the unsanctioned Christian Mission Church, had reported no problems with authorities until they tried to register their meeting point... Leaders from the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) reported authorities in Binh Phuoc province had tried to close down hundreds of house churches affiliated with their organization because they were not registered.'⁴⁰

2.6.2 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2013 - Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam, 30 April 2013, stated:

'Ethnic minority Protestants and Buddhists and religious groups that seek to operate independent of government control continue to experience severe abuses, including arrests, forced renunciations of faith, and long-term incarcerations... The government continues to view with suspicion the growth of Christianity among Hmong in Vietnam's northwest provinces...

'Hmong Protestants meet openly in some areas of the northwest provinces, something that was not allowed ten years ago. The Vietnamese government recognizes that there is a "genuine need" for religion among the Hmong. Nevertheless, provincial officials continue to discourage "new" Hmong converts to Protestantism through official intimidation, discrimination, and property confiscation if they do not renounce their faith. This tactic seems to be a policy developed and condoned by central government authorities and carried out in the provinces.'⁴¹

2.6.3 The same report further noted that:

'In March 2012, eight Hmong Protestants were sentenced to two years' imprisonment for "partaking in a separatist ethnic movement." They were arrested in May 2011 at a large religious gathering forcibly disbanded by police and military units... In April and June 2012, three Protestant from Gai Lai province in the Central Highlands, Kpuil Mel, Kpuil Le, and Nay Y Nga, were sentenced to a combined 22 years in prison for practicing Dega Protestantism, according to Human Rights Watch. In May 2012, three other ethnic Montagnard activists, Runh, Jonh, and Byuk, were arrested for affiliation with the unregistered Ha Mon Catholic group. They were charged with "undermining national unity"... Leaders in SECV and house churches in the provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Binh Phuoc, Phu Yen, and Dak Nong also experienced increased government scrutiny for alleged association with separatist groups overseas. In the past year, religious leaders also reported increased threats and restrictions on evangelism and pressure on new converts to recant their faith, policies the central government has sanctioned to stop the growth of Protestantism in the northwest provinces.'⁴²

2.6.4 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, Montagnard Christians in Vietnam: A Case Study in Religious Repression, 30 March 2011, stated:

⁴⁰ The US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014,

(Section II. Government Practices),

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 23 October 2014

⁴¹ ⁴¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report on 2013 Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (p196-205 – Religious Freedom Conditions),

[http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 24 October 2014

⁴² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report on 2013 Countries of

Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (p205 – Religious Freedom Conditions),

[http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 24 October 2014

‘In 2000 an activist Montagnard church movement - Tin Lanh Dega, or Dega Protestantism - emerged in the Central Highlands that combined evangelical Christianity with aspirations for greater political freedom, protection of ancestral lands, and for some, autonomy or self-rule. Less than one year later, in February 2001, unprecedented mass protests broke out in all four provinces of the Central Highlands. Thousands of Montagnards marched on the provincial towns to demand the return of ancestral lands and religious freedom.

‘In response, the government launched an aggressive crackdown, dispatching military and police units to seal off the region and arresting dozens of Montagnards, sometimes using torture to elicit confessions and public statements of remorse. By the end of 2001, Montagnards had been sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to 13 years, with another 32 individuals awaiting trial. Fearing arrest, many Montagnards went into hiding in Vietnam. By early 2002, more than 1,000 Montagnards had fled to Cambodia, where they were recognized as refugees and resettled abroad.

‘The past decade has seen ongoing waves of repression and unrest. In April 2004 thousands of Montagnards again took to the streets, with smaller protests taking place in September 2002 and April 2008.’

‘A complicating factor in the Central Highlands has been the mutual distrust between the government and the highlanders. The government asserts that Montagnards belonging to independent house churches are using religion as a front for political activities, while many Montagnards distrust the government-authorized Protestant church in the Central Highlands, the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV)... The Vietnamese government has launched a series of crackdowns during the last 10 years to suppress political organizing and independent religious activities among Montagnard Christians... During these crackdowns, authorities have committed clearcut violations of fundamental rights, including arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, and torture. Officials have employed coercion to pressure Montagnards to renounce their religion and pledge their loyalty to the government and the Communist Party of Vietnam.’ ¹⁷

¹⁷ ⁴³ Human Rights Watch (HRW), Montagnard Christians in Vietnam: A Case Study in Religious Repression, 30 March 2011, (p4), <http://www.hrw.org/node/97632>, date accessed 24 October 2014 ⁴⁴ Jubilee Campaign,

2.6.5 A February 2014 submission to the UN Human Rights Council by the Jubilee Campaign highlighted that “Ethnic minority Protestants continue to experience some of the harshest treatment by local authorities. Common violations include forced eviction, destruction of property and livestock, confiscation of property, blocking of access to public goods and services, discrimination in education and employment, and in some cases arrest, detention, torture and even death”.⁴⁴ Minority Rights Group states that “Christian organizations reported that over 50 Christians, including pastors and community leaders, were arrested in 2013, with one Hmong church elder reportedly dying in police custody.”⁴⁵

2.6.6 The 2013 US Commission on International Religious Freedom report for 2013 noted that:

‘The central government continues to assert that some Montagnards operate an illegal “Dega” church seeking the creation of an independent Montagnard state. (...) Unit PA43 (a Special Task Force of the Mobile Intervention Police) and provincial police are in the midst of a three-year campaign to capture and transform both “reactionary operatives” and “Dega Protestants.” These campaigns have led to beatings, detentions, deaths in custody, forced renunciations of faith, and disappearances of Montagnards suspected of being part of the Tin Lahn Dega... Authorities refuse to issue identity cards to ethnic minority Protestants in northern Vietnam that recognize their Protestant religious affiliation. This leaves them in a vulnerable position: either they have no identity card and cannot receive government benefits, or they are identified as subscribing to no religion, which may be used to prevent their attendance at churches... Reports continue of forced renunciations of faith, specifically targeting ethnic minorities who convert to Protestantism. These efforts are not isolated cases, but are sanctioned by central government authorities to thwart the growth of Protestantism among ethnic minorities.’⁴⁶

2.6.7 The US RIRF 2013 report noted:

‘The government continued to say some Montagnards, an ethnic minority in the Central Highlands, were operating Protestant organizations which advocated separatism for ethnic minorities. The SECV [Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam] and house churches in the provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Binh Phuoc, Phu Yen, and Dak Nong continued to experience government scrutiny because of perceived association with separatist groups overseas. Followers of the unsanctioned Church of Christ reported local authorities in the Central Highlands provinces had harassed and persecuted them. They said police had pressured the followers to abandon the church, and that police stated the church was connected with FULRO (Front Unifié pour la Libération des Races Opprimées), which the government considers a minority separatist organization.’⁴⁷

Written statement* submitted by the Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, 27 February 2014, (p3), http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1395162617_g1411453.pdf, date accessed 13 November 2014⁴⁵ Minority Rights Group International, State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014, 3 July 2014, http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/4232_1404983162_mrg-state-of-the-worlds-minorities-2014-asia-oceania.pdf, date accessed 13 November 2014

See also:

Country Information and Guidance on:

- ▶ [Vietnam: Minority ethnic groups](#) (Specifically Section 2.4: Degar / Montagnard and section 2.5: Hmong)
- ▶ [Vietnam: Opposition to the government](#)

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2.7 Freedom of movement

⁴⁶ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Annual report 2013 Countries of Particular Concern: Vietnam (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), 30 April 2013, (Central Highlands: Montagnard Protestants & Ha Mon Catholics, p204), [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf), date accessed 13 November 2014

⁴⁷ The US State Department, 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom (RIRF) - Vietnam, 28 July 2014, (Section II. Government Practices), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222181#wrapper>, date accessed 23 October 2014

2.7.1 The US State Department's 2013 Country Report on Human Rights Practices (USSD Report 2013), Vietnam, published on 27 February 2014, noted that:

'The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government imposed some limits on the movement of certain individuals. The government generally cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

'Local government authorities did not hinder the UNHCR fact-finding and monitoring visits to the Mekong Delta, Hue, Da Nang, and the Northwest Highlands. Provincial governments generally continued to honor their obligations to reintegrate peacefully ethnic minority returnees from Cambodia.' ¹⁸

2.7.2 The USSD Report 2013 further added that:

'Several political dissidents, amnestied with probation or under house arrest, were officially restricted in their movements. These included Le Cong Dinh, Pham Hong Son, Nguyen Van Dai, Nguyen Phuong Uyen, and Dinh Nhat Uy.

¹⁸ US State Department (USSD), 2013 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam, 27 February 2014, (Section 2 - Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220244#wrapper>, date accessed 6 October 2014

‘A government restriction regarding travel to certain areas requires citizens and resident foreigners to obtain a permit to visit border areas; defense facilities; industrial zones involved in national defense; areas of “national strategic storage”; and “works of extreme importance for political, economic, cultural, and social purposes.”

‘Local police require citizens to register when staying overnight in any location outside of their own homes; the government appeared to enforce these requirements more strictly in some Central and Northern Highlands districts. Foreign passport holders must also register to stay in private homes, although there were no known cases of local authorities refusing to allow foreign visitors to stay with friends and family.

‘Authorities did not broadly implement this residence law, and migration from rural areas to cities continued unabated. Moving without permission, however, hampered persons seeking legal residence permits, public education, and health-care benefits.’¹⁹

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Annex A: Map of Vietnam

Map of Vietnam (2009) sourced from the Encyclopaedia Britannica Online²⁰.

¹⁹ US State Department (USSD), 2013 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam, 27 February 2014, (Section 2 - Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220244#wrapper>, date accessed 6 October 2014

²⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Vietnam" Map, 2009, <http://www.britannica.com/media/full/61748>, date accessed 12 November 2014



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Change Record

Version	Date	Change References
1.0	December 2014	First version of country information and guidance.

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