

Protests Against Religious Liberties Infractions in Vietnam

Dear/Sirs:

Vietnam is to be commended for extending some religious freedom to some groups through its new religion legislation of 2004/2005, and for halting large and heavy-handed government programs to stop the expansion of Protestant Christianity.

There are, regrettably, notable exceptions to improvement in which Vietnam blatantly denies religious freedom and continues to persecute believers. These exceptions, plus wide variations and great tardiness in extending religious freedom put into serious question the sincerity of Vietnam's stated policy of improving religious freedom for all.

Following are some egregious examples for which Vietnam should be required give account.

1) A large, new church building in Cu Hat, Dak Lak province was demolished on December 17, 2008 by an overwhelming force of government officials, security personnel and agents, all disguised as civilians, using excessive force, injuring civilians and denying them medical help.

Where is justice and due process in bringing overwhelming force - many hundreds of officials and workers, all disguised in civilian clothes, carrying sticks and axes and electric cattle prods and guns - against a peaceful congregation of Christians whose "crime" is to aspire to worship God together under a roof?

Why do authorities go to such great expense in commandeering or renting dozens of buses and trucks, and why do they cover the license plates when they came to demolish a Christian chapel built to meet a legitimate religious need?

Why is proper medical help and even food denied Christian believers ruthlessly injured by the authorities? Why do security police disguise themselves as medical staff, threatening those they have wounded?

Why is a Christian chapel the only building of many hundreds in the surrounding area cited for use of illegal lumber?

Why have none of the many dozens of congregations of this church organization, which have submitted requests to register their activities locally, according to the *Prime Minister's Special Directive on Protestants of 04/02/2005*, received approval?

If Vietnamese authorities argue they followed their civil and religion laws in this action, why are they so unjustly, selectively and harshly enforced against Christians?

Why does Vietnam, which has shown progress in extending some religious freedom to some religious communities, seem to get away with such an egregious violation human dignity and religious freedom in the name of enforcing its laws?

We request that Vietnam use its new religion legislation of 2004/2005 to enable the Cu Hat congregation to practice their religion peacefully, and that all actions against the Cu Hat congregation cease.

We request that the government immediately register the many VNGNC congregations which have submitted registration requests. Contrary to its own regulations, the government has denied or ignored these requests.

We request the government stop interference into the training of workers of the VNGNC at its Bible School in Banmethuot.

We will have an update in two months time on any action prompted by this petition and we would like to see prompt action taken by the Vietnamese government to decrease these, and other human rights infractions and to increase religious liberty.

We request that the government cease the subterfuge of refusing to register congregations as Vietnam's own religion laws require, and then limiting, harassing or persecuting them because they are unregistered.

