

Vietnam: government and government-established Cao Dai Sect attempted to prevent authentic Cao Dai adherents from conducting a religious rite at a private home in Bến Cầu Township, Tây Ninh Province on January 6, 2021

The victims consent to have their names disclosed in a letter that may be sent as appropriate to the Vietnamese Government, or others, and have his name appear in a public report presented to the Human Rights Council and inserted in a public database.

To: Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations at Geneva
CH1211 Geneva 10

(1) General information

Summary: A Cao Dai adherent had more than 2 dozen fellow adherents perform an important Cao Dai rite at his home. The police and government-controlled Cao Dai Sect came to stop the rite because Vietnam allows only government-controlled religious groups to operate openly without harassment by the police.

- Did the incidents involve an individual or a group? A group of about 30 adherents of the authentic Cao Dai Church

- Location of incident: Bến Cầu Township, Bến Cầu District, Tây Ninh Province, Vietnam

-Nationality and ethnic group of victim: Vietnamese citizenship, Kinh (dominant ethnic group)

-Does national policy require registration for religious activities? If yes, what is the current status of the group? Yes, required.¹ The Communist government established a Cao Dai denomination in 1997 (with fundamental doctrinal differences from the authentic Cao Dai religion that was established in 1926, in other words, not the same religion) and turned over the original Cao Dai Church's assets to the 1997 sect. Further, the 1997 sect has been used to infiltrate and oppress the authentic Cao Dai Church.

(2) Identity of the persons concerned

1. Trần Ngọc Điệp, Male, address: Tây Ninh Province, DoB 1956

2. Nguyễn Anh Phụng, Male, address: Long Hoà Commune, Town of Gò Công, Tiền Giang Province, DoB 1979

3. Trần Thanh Liêm, Male, address: No. 1138, Section 3, Bến Cầu Township, Tây Ninh Province, DoB 1956.

And nearly 30 others.

They are with the authentic Cao Dai Church; Vietnamese citizenship, Kinh ethnic group.

(3) Information on the alleged violation(s)

-Date and time (approximate if not known exactly):

- January 6, 2021: Trần Thanh Liêm at his home, No. 1138, Section 3, Bến Cầu Township, Bến Cầu District, Tây Ninh Province.

11:45 AM

¹The Law on Belief and Religion uses the devious approach of implicitly requiring registration because this law denies the possibility of acquiring legal personality unless an organization is registered, but does not state that registration is a prerequisite for conducting religious activities.

Mr. Trần Thanh Liêm requested adherents of the authentic Cao Dai Church to participate in the Ceremony of Installing the Divine Eye Banner on the altar of his home on January 6, 2021. Approximately 30 authentic Cao Dai adherents, including the host family started the religious rite. Around 11:45 AM, over 20 local government officials and adherents of the government-established Cao Dai Sect (the 1997 Sect) from Lợi Thuận Commune, Bến Cầu Township, led by a 1997 Sect adherent, Mr. Năm Hoàng (religious name: Thượng Hoàng Thanh).

Perpetrators List 1

1. Nguyễn Phú Hòa, Vice Chair, Government of Bến Cầu Township)
2. Phan Huỳnh Kha (Chairman, Vietnam Fatherland Front of Bến Cầu Township)
3. Trần Phú Đông (Chief, Police of Bến Cầu Township)
4. Mr. Năm Hoàng, a leader of the local 1997 Cao Dai Sect
5. Militia members of Lợi Thuận Commune
6. Police officers of Lợi Thuận Commune and Bến Cầu Township,
7. 10 men and women in plain clothes.

Mr. Năm Hoàng and his 1997 Sect adherents asked the authentic Cao Dai Church to stop the rite and wait for the local police to resolve the issue. The local government officials echoed the 1997 Sect in asking the authentic Church to stop the rite.

The authentic Church adherents said that the government request must be in writing and therefore they would not stop the rite without such a document.

A few plainclothes perpetrators tried to forcibly stop the rite, but authentic adherents stopped them.

The government side requested the host to talk and so Mr. Trần Thanh Liêm stopped his participation in the rite to talk to them.

A man, who identified himself as an official of Lợi Thuận Commune, hit the hand of the authentic adherent Nguyễn Anh Phụng to stop him from livestreaming the violation of religious freedom. The cell phone crashed on the floor and its screen was broken.

At the conclusion of the rite at 12:30 PM, the 1997 Sect threatened the authentic adherents and blocked the exit to prevent them from leaving the house.

Other violent acts took place (see Addendum on Evidence) in the presence with the local police and government representatives.

Mr. Phan Huỳnh Kha (Chairman, Vietnam Fatherland Front of Bến Cầu Township) said that the authentic Cao Dai adherents met without first informing the local government and a number of them did not wear masks. The authentic adherents retorted that several among the government group, including Hòa, the senior police officer, and the plainclothes agents did not have masks. Mr. Liêm (the host) had notified the local government and received this reply when he talked to them:

“there is no permit they could issue for the event because this is a religious freedom issue”.

-Identification of the alleged perpetrator(s), name(s) if known and/or function, suspected motive: see Perpetrator list.

-Are the perpetrator(s) known to the victim? Yes.

-Are State agents or non-State actors believed to be responsible for the alleged violation? State agents.

-If the perpetrators are believed to be State agents, please specify (police, military, agents of security services, unit to which they belong, rank and functions, etc.), and indicate why they are believed to be responsible:

Please see the perpetrator lists in the previous section.

(4) Steps taken by the victim, his/her family, or anyone else on his/her behalf?

- Please indicate if complaints have been filed, when, by whom, and before which State authorities or competent bodies (i.e., police, prosecutor, court, etc.). No

- Were there any other steps taken? None.

- Steps taken by the authorities: None.

- Indicate whether or not, to your knowledge, there have been investigations by the State authorities; if so, what kind of investigations? Please indicate progress and status of these investigations and which other measures have been taken: None.

- In case of complaints by the victim or his family, how have those authorities or other competent bodies dealt with them? What has been the outcome of those proceedings? The government and its Cao Dai sect would not do anything to help.

(5) Identity of the person or institution submitting this form:

- Boat People SOS, Email: info@bpsos.org using information provided by the Junior Sacerdotal Council of the Cao Dai Church.

- Đỗ Minh Đức, Vice Chair, External Relations Committee, the Junior Sacerdotal Council of the Cao Dai Church (authentic), Houston, TX.

- Individual or organization authorized to represent: BPSOS, a nonprofit organization based in Virginia, USA.

Do you act with knowledge and on behalf of the victim(s)? Yes.

Please state whether you want your identity to be kept confidential: no

Date you are submitting this form: January 12, 2021.

Addendum 1. Evidence

Exhibit 1: Authentic adherents participating in the religious rite at the home of Mr. Trần Thanh Liêm in Bến Cầu District, Tây Ninh Province.



Exhibit 2, Mr. Năm Hoàng, representative of the government's Cao Dai Sect (in white Cao Dai religious vestments, pointing finger. On his left, the woman in the conical hat, pushed an authentic Cao Dai adherent (female), hurting her (see description on a subsequent page)



Exhibit 3: The representative of the government/police of Lợi Thuận Commune (struck the hand of Mr. Phụng and caused his phone to crash on the floor) with the white undershirt and red helmet, wearing a mask.)



Exhibits 4a and 4b: A female adherent of the authentic Cao Dai Church was pushed by the woman in the pink shirt and dark purple pants shown in Exhibits 3 and 4. The victim fell from her motorbike and had to dry her blood with some paper towels and use her mask as a bandage.





Exhibit 5: Host Trần Thanh Liêm - in white Cao Dai religious vestment and religious turban - talking to Năm Hoàng, 1997 Sect leader and local government officials.



Exhibit 6: The representative of the government of Bến Cầu Township, Nguyễn Phú Hòa - Vice chair, government of Bến Cầu Township (sitting at the table, in a blue shirt), and Phan Huỳnh Kha - Chairman, Vietnam Fatherland Front of Bến Cầu Township (in a white shirt, masked)



Exhibit 7: Trần Phú Đông - Chief, Police of Bến Cầu Township.



Exhibit 8. Local militia members used to persecute this religious group



Video clips

1/ <https://www.facebook.com/chaudaogocongcu/videos/136576501603162>

2/ <https://www.facebook.com/chaudaogocongcu/videos/425537101931807>

3/ <https://www.facebook.com/chaudaogocongcu/videos/151563956530889>

4/ <https://www.facebook.com/chaudaogocongcu/videos/150941703469184>