

Vietnam: The government's Cao Dai Sect and police in Bến Cầu District, Tây Ninh Province, attempted to stop adherents of the authentic Cao Dai Church from conducting a religious rite in a private home in September 2020

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 family of adherents of the authentic Cao Dai Church invited other adherents of the authentic Cao Dai Church (established in 1926) to their home to perform an important Cao Dai rite. The local police and adherents of the Communist-controlled Cao Dai sect (established in 1997 by the Communist Party of Vietnam) intruded to intimidate and stop the authentic adherents from conducting the rite because the Communists wanted their Cao Dai sect to monopolize the leadership of all Cao Dai religious life in Vietnam.

- *Did the incidents involve an individual or a group?* Around 40 individuals.

- *Location of incident:* Long Phi Hamlet, Long Thuận Commune, 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. Following North Vietnam's takeover of South Vietnam, the Communist government initially dismantled the Cao Dai Church's administrative structure and seized all church properties, including the Holy See Temple, and many other temples. 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, backed by the police and government agencies. Those adherents who want to have religious freedom without submitting to State control are persecuted by the government and its 1997 sect.

(2) Identity of the persons concerned

1. Family name: Võ Middle name: Văn Given name: Điệt) Gender: Male DoB:
Address: 916 Long Phi Hamlet, Long Thuận Commune, Bến Cầu District, Tây Ninh Province.

Mr. Võ Văn Điệt hosted a group of fellow adherents whom he had requested to conduct a major Cao Dai rite at his home.

Addendum 1 contains personal information of several other victims.

(3) Information on the alleged violation(s)

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

- **September 11, 2020**

Võ Công Huy, the son of Mr. Võ Văn Điệt, invited authentic Cao Dai adherents to perform the rite of Installing the Divine Eye Banner on the home altar and pray for the healing of Huy's mother, Ms. Lê Thị Chinh.

Around 10:30 AM, a member of the 1997 Cao Dai sect, Mr. Lê Văn Rem, the chairman of the executive committee of a local Cao Dai parish, came to the home of Mr. Điệt as members of the authentic Cao Dai Church who came from a number of provinces were getting ready for the traditional rite. Mr. Rem demanded to lead the rite, citing that he was the official rites leader for the Cao Dai congregation in the commune.

One of the authentic Cao Dai adherents, Mr. Sương, asked Mr. Rem to show any regulation which would prohibit the authentic adherents from conducting the rite. Suddenly Mr. Rem slapped Sương violently in the face and then pushed him, making him fall to the ground and his body hit some corrugated metal roofing sheets. The victim's friends had to intervene when Mr. Rem tried to hit another authentic Cao Dai adherent. Rem was requested to leave the house.

Shortly after 11:00 AM, 3 police officers arrived, ordered the adherents to refrain from taking pictures. They asked about the fight. The adherents said that Mr. Rem had slapped a victim. The police asked Mr. Sương, the victim, to come to the police station of the commune. He replied: "I haven't filed a complaint and therefore you have no reason to request me to go to the police station. I will find a complaint later because right now I am tied up with this rite". The officers left.

Around 11:30 AM, Mr. Chích of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect arrived and asked why the host had not requested permission before conducting the rite and why he had not requested the rites team of the 1997 sect to conduct the rite. Mr. Điệt replied: "The 1997 Cao Dai Sect represents a different religion while we follow the authentic Cao Dai religion. Also, we don't trust a government-controlled sect." The family requested the intruder to leave.

Around 12:30 PM, the chairman of Long Thuận Commune and 2 of his employees arrived. They asked why the adherents had assembled for the rite when the 1997 Cao Dai Sect was the only entity authorized to conduct rites.

Perpetrator List No. 1

- 1. Lê Văn Rem, chairman of the executive committee of a parish and member of the Rites Committee of Long Thuận Commune.**
- 2. Mr. Chích, adherent of the Pious rank, head of the Cao Dai congregation of Long Thuận Commune.**
- 3. Lê Minh Toàn, captain, police of Long Thuận Commune**
- 4. Lê Hoàng Kiếm, senior first lieutenant, police of Long Thuận Commune**
- 5. The chairman of Long Thuận Commune (name not known)**

- **September 13, 2020**

The authentic adherents continued to conduct the Healing Rite through Prayers for the health of the wife of the host (Mr. Điệt), Ms. Lê Thị Chinh. Around 11 AM, the 1997 Cao Dai Sect came in the persons of Mr. Lê Văn Rem, 2 members of his family, another chairman of the executive committee of a parish, and a number of other adherents of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect arrived. The host had the gate locked. The intruders remained outside but made a lot of noise to disrupt the rite which took place in the house. Mr. Chích, one of the adherents of

the 1997 Cao Dai Sect, was allowed to enter the house. He tried to convince the host to let the 1997 Cao Dai sect conduct the rite, but the host declined.

Perpetrator List No, 2

1. Lê Văn Rem, chairman of the executive committee of a parish and member of the Rites Committee of Long Thuận Commune.

2. Mr. Chích, adherent of the Pious rank, head of the Cao Dai congregation of Long Thuận Commune.

Which indications exist that the victim(s) has been targeted because of his/her religion or belief? It is clear that the government’s motive has been to deny freedom of religion to Cao Dai adherents who chose to follow their traditional faith.

-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 and quasi State agents (1997 Cao Dai Sect)

-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 via Mr. Duc Minh Do.

- Individual or organization authorized to represent: BPSOS and Junior Sacerdotal Council.

- Status: BPSOS is a non-profit organization

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

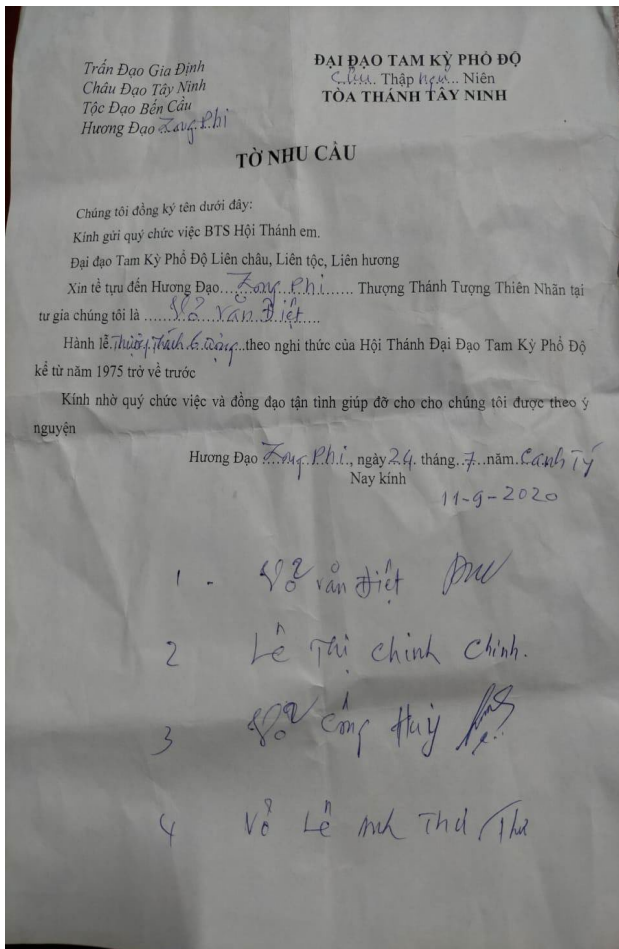
Date you are submitting this form: September 20, 2020.

Addendum 1. Identity of the persons concerned

	<i>Family name</i>	<i>Middle name, Given name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>DoB</i>
1	Võ	Văn Điệt	Male	Tây Ninh	1966
2	Lê	Thị Chính	Female	Tây Ninh	1969
3	Võ	Công Huy	Male	Tây Ninh	1993

4	Nguyễn	Ngọc Diễm	Male	Tiền Giang	1966
5	Nguyễn	Thành Ngộ	Male	Tiền Giang	1937
6	Nguyễn	Hồng Phượng	Female	Tiền Giang	1975
7	Nguyễn	Ngọc Trung	Male	Tiền Giang	1983
8	Nguyễn	Văn Tờ	Male	Tây Ninh	
9	Nguyễn	Văn Tài	Male	Tây Ninh	
10	Trần	Minh Triều	Male	Long An	
11	Lê	Văn Sơn	Male	Tây Ninh	
12	Toang	Văn Vui	Male	Tây Ninh	
13	Võ	Thị Liêm	Female	Tây Ninh	
14	Nguyễn	Hoàng Khang	Male	Tây Ninh	
15	Trần	Văn Hạp	Male	Tây Ninh	
16	Trần	Thị Điệp	Female	Tây Ninh	
17	Võ	Thị Hồng Vân	Female	Tây Ninh	
18	Nguyễn	Hồ Đạm	Male	Tiền Giang	
19	Nguyễn	Ngọc Hải Luân	Male	Tiền Giang	
20	Trần	Ngọc Điệp	Male	Tây Ninh	1956
21	Lê	Văn Một	Male	Long An	1955
23	Trần	Ngọc Sương	Male	Tiền Giang	1956

Addendum 2. Evidence



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Exhibit 1. July 24, 2020 request sent to the authentic Cao Dai Church - represented by the Junior Sacerdotal Council, inviting some of the members in Vietnam to perform the Cao Dai rite of Installing the Divine Eye Banner at the home of Mr. Điệt, signed by him, his wife, his son, and his daughter. The Cao Dai adherents who resist government pressure for them to submit to the control of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect, established a "Junior" Sacerdotal Council after the Communist government disbanded the legitimate Sacerdotal Council of the authentic Cao Dai Church and established its Cao Dai sect in 1997.

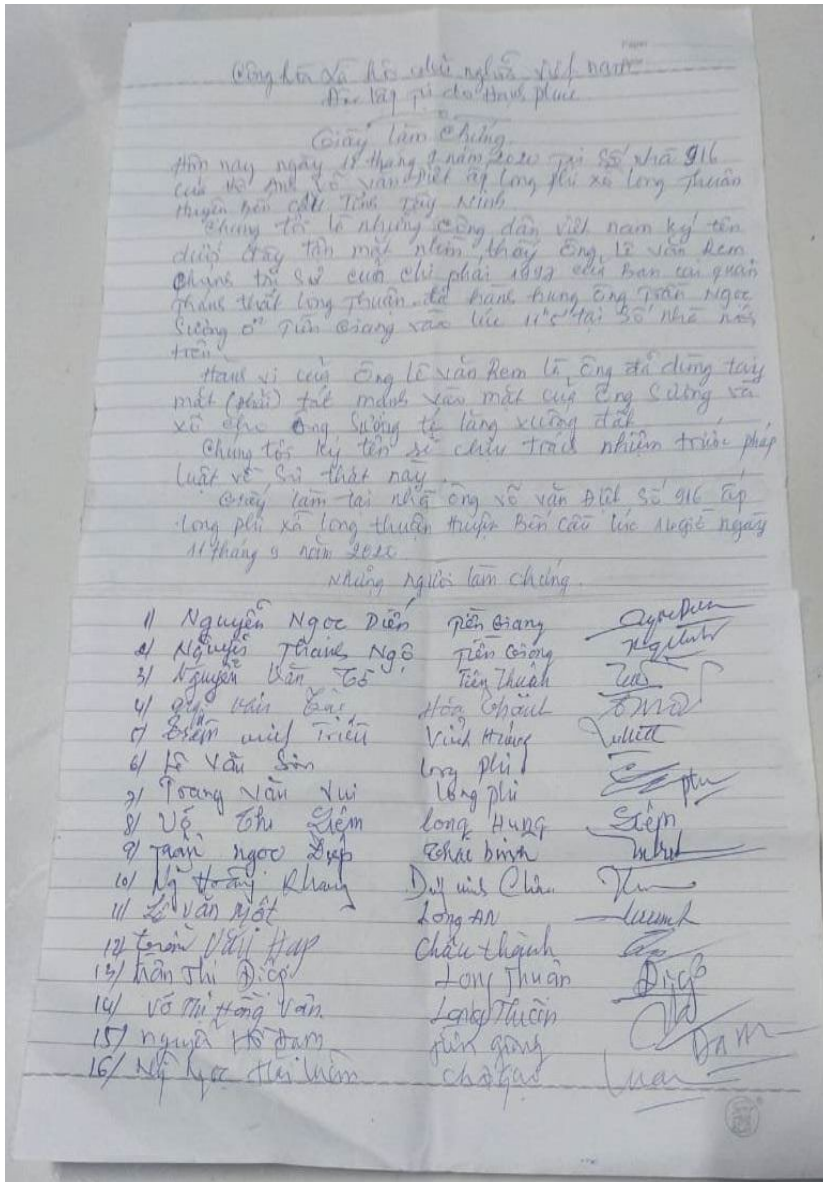


Exhibit 2. 16 witnesses declared that Lê Văn Rem (1997 Cao Dai Sect) used force against Trần Ngọc Sĩng, one of the authentic Cao Dai Church adherents who had come to the house at the host's request.



Exhibit 3. Location where Mr. Trần Ngọc Sương was pushed by Mr. Rem. The victim fell to the ground here and his body hit some of the corrugated metals being stored there.



Exhibit 4. Captain Lê Minh Toàn and Senior First Lieutenant Lê Hoàng Kiểm (both in uniforms) on September 11, 2020.



Exhibit 5. Mr. Chích of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect (wearing the safety helmet, facing forward)



Exhibit 6. Mr. Lê Văn Rem of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect (left arm bent, with hand resting on his hip) talking to the host, Mr. Sương, whose back is shown in this photo, walked towards the two people. A moment later, Rem slapped Sương and pushed him violently, making him fall to the ground.

Link to videos in Google drive:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15M9326veDCfEPqd-2dHRYcRpAGVvqKGe?usp=sharing>

Video 1: Lê Văn Rem was requested to leave after he hit one of the victims, Mr. Sương

- 0:36' -> 1':13": the host told Mr. Rem that he had attacked an adherent and therefore he should leave the house

- 1':59" -> 2':02": Rem said: "I guarantee....to do it....won't be allowed to go home."

Video 2 & Video 3: Police officers Lê Minh Toàn and Lê Hoàng Kiếm arrived at the home of the host, Mr. Điệt:

Video 2, 0':04" -> 0':07": Police: "What happened to cause a fight here?"

Video 3, 0':29" ->0':36": the host described what had taken place and said that Mr. Rem must bear responsibility for the incident.

Video 4 & Video 5: *Mr. Chích (1997 Cao Dai Sect) entered the home of Mr. Điệp and requested to talk to the leader of the rite:*

Video 4:

- 2':35" ->3':10": Trần Ngọc Điệp, one of the invited authentic adherents (also the chairman of the executive committee of a Cao Dai parish) spoke about the host inviting him to this house to conduct the Cao Dai rite and about the right to freedom of religion or belief.

- 3':50"->4':05": Mr. Chích of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect requested Mr. Điệp to refrain from conducting the rite because this was not approved. Chích asked to see the formal request which the host had submitted to the Junior Sacerdotal Council for having authentic adherents come to his home and perform the rite.

- 5': 05"->5':21" : Mr. Điệp said: "the law treats all citizens as equals and ensures freedom of religion and belief for all...The local government and the government-controlled Governing Council of the Cao Dai Church has no right to limit this freedom...Forcing us to submit to your 1997 sect is a violation of this freedom".

- 5':22"-> 5':49" : Mr. Chích of the 1997 sect said: "If you did not worship the Divine Eye, it would not be our concern.... but you worship the Divine Eye, you are therefore a Cao Dai adherent. We, the Governing Council, have the authority to approve or deny you the right to be here..."

Video 5: The host said to Mr. Chích: "If you don't approve, please complain to the Holy See...Don't hamper our religious activities.."

Video 6: The commune police and health clinic staff came to get the names of all the guests who were having lunch in the house.

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Video 1 and part of Video 2: *Mr. Rem and his group was not allowed into the house. They stood outside and attempted the rite with loud noises such as banging repeatedly on the gate and shouting.*

Videos 2, 3 and 4: *More loud behavior by the 1997 sect. The host allowed just Mr. Chích into the house for more discussion. This representative of the government side eventually left because he could not overcome the host's resistance.*