

December 16, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW Washington, DC 20520

Cc:

The Honorable Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights
The Honorable Rashad Hussain, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We, the undersigned U.S.-based organizations, call on your good office to designate the Socialist Republic of Vietnam a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for systematic ongoing and egregious persecution against independent religious communities and religions.

Despite being on the Special Watch List for the past two years, its government has steadfastly escalated religious persecution, both directly and through the use of state-controlled religious and pseudo-religious organizations. Below is a sample of systematic egregious violations occurring this year.

- (1) In early 2024, the state-controlled Buddhist Church of Vietnam defrocked Khmer Krom Buddhist monks who declared independence from it, setting the stage for their arrest and criminal prosecution by the police. On November 26, six Khmer Krom Buddhist monks and three of their followers were sentenced to prison terms between two and six years.
- (2) Throughout the year, the Vietnamese police, with the support of the state-controlled Evangelical Church of Vietnam – South, coerced hundreds of Montagnard Christians to quit their house churches and join ECVN-South. Montagnard Christians who resisted were forcibly disappeared, imprisoned or extrajudicially killed: Mr. Nay Y Blang sentenced to 4.5 years; Mr. Y Krec Bya sentenced to 13 years; Mr. Y Bum Bya found dead after his purported meeting with the police; Mr. Y Think Nie forcibly disappeared since September 5.
- (3) In early 2024, the police falsely accused Montagnards Stand for Justice, a human rights organization, of terrorism, sentenced one of its co-founder in absentia to ten years of imprisonment, and threatened to prosecute for terrorism any Montagnards attending MSFJ's training on how to report human rights violations to UN Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies.

- (4) In early November, members of the Cao Dai Sect, which was created by the government in 1997, violently attacked mourning relatives and guests at the funeral of a Cao Dai follower in Truong Hoa Village, Hoa Thanh District, Tay Ninh Province. They were accompanied by thugs and government cadres wearing facemasks. The police did not respond when called by the victims.
- (5) The government continues to force Hmong Christians to abandon their faith. The state-controlled Evangelical Church of Vietnam – North expelled its own members who defended their faith in defiance of the local authorities' order. The wife and young children in Vietnam of a Hmong American constituent of Congressman Glenn Grothman were among the targeted victims of forced renunciation of faith; they were blocked from joining their American husband and father in the United States. Thanks to the strong intervention of the Congressman, family members were finally reunited in May of this year.
- (6) Earlier this month, Vietnamese Atty. Trinh Vinh Phuc arrived in the United States to seek asylum. He was preceded by three other human rights lawyers who fled to the United States in June after the police of Long An Province issued summons and a search notice for criminal investigation against them. All four lawyers co-represented the Zen Hermitage on the Edge of the Universe, a small Buddhist group that was severely persecuted for not joining the state-created Buddhist Church of Vietnam. In July 2022, its 92-years old founder and five young monks were sentenced to a total of 23.5 years in prison. The Vietnamese police now go after the lawyers who represented them.

After two years on the Special Watch List, Vietnam certainly deserves the CPC designation for its intensifying crackdown on independent Hoa Hao Buddhists, Cao Dai followers, Montagnard and Hmong Christians, Catholic parishioners, Khmer Krom Buddhists, members of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam as well as unaffiliated Buddhist groups.

Your attention to this serious matter is respectfully requested.

Sincerely,



Nguyen Dinh Thang, PhD
President & CEO, Boat People SOS

On behalf of:

1. Advocates for Faith and Justice in Vietnam (AFJV)
2. Boat People SOS (BPSOS)
3. Buddhist Solidarity Association (BSA)
4. Cao Dai Tay Ninh temples of Texas

5. CaoDai Today
6. Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
7. Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam
8. Committee to Unite Cao-Dai Disciples
9. CSW USA
10. Evangelical Church of Christ of the Central Highlands
11. Hmong Human Rights Coalition
12. First Freedom Foundation - Patrice J. Pederson, President
13. Friends of Thien Am Monastery
14. Independent Journalists Association in Vietnam
15. Jubilee Campaign USA
16. Montagnards Stand for Justice (MSFJ)
17. Red Eagle Enterprises - Scott Morgan, President
18. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHHR)
19. Vietnam Coalition Against Torture (VN-CAT)
20. Vietnamese American Community of the USA