

Vietnam: A score members of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect (established by the government in 1997) forced their way into a private home and violently disrupted a funeral rite in Tây Ninh Province in November 2024 because the deceased's family did not want sect members to lead the funeral rite. The Vietnamese police turned a blind eye to this massive violation.

To: Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
United Nations at Geneva

(1) General Information

Summary

Trường Hòa Commune, Tây Ninh Province, 31 October and 1 November 2024: The deceased was a follower of the Cao Dai Church founded in 1926. His widow followed his wish - he preferred that their fellow church members participate in his funeral rite. The government-established Cao Dai Sect aggressively disrupted the event because the family did not rely on the funeral group of the sect. The sect (established in 1997 by the communist government) follows a doctrine that is not compatible with the 1926 Cao Dai Church and is deemed an "organized criminal gang" by a court in Texas, USA. The Cao Dai sect established by the government in 1997 has a history of religious intolerance mirroring the Vietnamese government, its creator and protector. This latest event is one of the most egregious attacks against a family which follows the traditional, authentic Cao Dai Church established in 1926. For example, sect members used force to seize items needed for the funeral music. On the second day of the attack, sect members from other communes and thugs (suspected to be security police in civilian clothing), entered and used chairs to hit the funeral guests invited by the widow. She called "113", the local emergency call number, three times but the authorities ignored her calls. The victims managed to stay together until the attackers eventually departed.

- *Did the incidents involve an individual or a group?* Many adherents of the authentic Cao Dai Church.

- *Location of incident:* Town of Hòa Thành, Tây Ninh Province, Vietnam

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

- *Does national policy require registration for religious activities? If yes, what is the current status of the group?* Yes, required. 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.

(2) Identity of the persons concerned

In Addendum 1.

(3) Information on the alleged violation(s)

The family of Mr. Lữ Minh Châu (deceased) followed his wish to have fellow church members from the 1926 Cao Dai Church participate in the rite for his funeral.

- **31 October 2024** - victim: widow Trần Thị Lan - a resident of Trường Hòa Commune, Town of Hòa Thành, and several invited guests

The governing committee of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect in Trường Hòa Commune came to demand the widow let the sect handle the funeral rite. The widow replied that her husband had expressed his desire to have only members of the traditional Cao Dai Church participate in the

rite. The sect members did not leave when the widow asked them to do so. They caused trouble and seized stands used to hold the ceremonial drums needed for the funeral.

- **1 November 2024** - victim: widow Trần Thị Lan - a resident of Trường Hòa Commune, Town of Hòa Thành, and several invited guests

The governing committee of the 1997 Cao Dai Sect in Trường Hòa Commune, augmented with the governing committees of nearby communes and thuggish individuals came to the victim's home to disrupt the funeral rite. The widow called the emergency reporting phone number three times. The police did not respond. The scuttle was so worrisome that another 1926 Cao Dai Church member, Ms. Nguyễn Xuân Mai in Vĩnh Long City, had to call the political officer of the US Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City. While the consulate general officer encouraged the caller to share a report on the incident with the US, he did not call the local authorities. The attackers left fifteen minutes later. Only then could the funeral rite resume.

Video clip showing the attack (with English subtitles):

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/14bod93eVL/>

Perpetrator List No. 1

- 1. Ms. Năm Hui (this is how people call her)**, Parish executive committee chair, Trường Long Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)
- 2. Mr. Lợi**, Parish executive committee chair, Trường Cửu Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)
- 3. Mr. Vàng**, member, Executive committee of Trường Lợi Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)
- 4. Mr. Bảy Nhi (this is how people call him)**, former member, Executive committee of Trường Hòa Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)
- 5. Mr. Tâm**, member, Executive Committee of Trường Long Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)
- 6. Thugs in plainclothes (perhaps security police officers)**

(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.). Yes (in Addendum).
- 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 authentic Cao Dai Church (Ms. Nguyễn Xuân Mai).
- 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: 17 November 2024

Addendum 1. Identity of the persons concerned

The victims are Vietnamese citizens and followers of the Cao Dai Church established in 1926, and authorize Boat People SOS to represent them.

1. Trần Thị Lan (the widow) Gender: female DoB: 1949
Address: 12 Lane 79, Trường Thọ Hamlet, Trường Hòa Commune, Town of Hòa Thành, Tây Ninh Province
2. Trần Văn Đực (invited by Ms. Lan) Gender: male DoB: 1959
Address: Long Thuận Commune, Bến Cầu District, Tây Ninh Province
3. Trần Ngọc Sương (invited by Ms. Lan) Gender: male DoB: 1956
Address: 27/26 Kp 6, Ward 1, Town of Gò Công, Tiền Giang Province.
4. Nguyễn Anh Phụng (invited by Ms. Lan) Gender: male DoB: 1979
Address: 1/1/1979. Kp 1, Ward 5, Town of Gò Công, Tiền Giang Province
and several other guests.

Addendum 2. Evidence



Widow Trần Thị Lan and her husband's coffin.



The two stands for the ceremonial drums had been seized on 31 October, 2024 by the attackers. On 1 November, the 1926 Cao Dai Church followers had to improvise using plastic chairs.



Ms. Năm Hui, Chair, Executive Committee of Trường Long Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)



Mr. Vàng, Member, Executive Committee of Trường Lợi Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)



Mr. Tâm (wears glasses), member of the Executive Committee of Trường Long Parish (1997 Cao Dai Sect)



Violent thugs dressed in dark color clothes (perhaps security police officers)



Thug (or security police officer in plain clothes) using a red plastic chair to attack the widow

Video summarizing the sect's attack in Trường Hòa Commune, Town of Hòa Thành, Tây Ninh Province (with English subtitles): <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/14bod93eVL/>