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## **Govt seizes Benedictine land in Vietnam**

### ***Property theft follows desecration of cross and statue of Jesus***

UCA NEWS (10.07.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2uHuYS1> - The Vietnamese government has stolen land owned by the Benedictine order in central Vietnam says the head of the country's bishops.

"Government authorities have stolen Benedictine land and sold it to local and foreign enterprises because they want to attract investment from enterprises," Archbishop Joseph Nguyen Chi Linh, head of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam told Eglises D'Asie on Jul. 3, while he was in France.

The government has seized most of 107 hectares of farm land and pine forest but left six hectares for Thien An Monastery itself.

Archbishop Linh, 67, accused authorities of "mocking Benedictines' rights and religious organizations' rights as well."

The monks have had legal ownership of the monastery in central Thua Thien Hue Province since 1940.

The alleged theft of land was not an isolated incident.

On June 28-29, police were among a crowd of some 200 people — some armed with knives, iron rods and batons — who broke into the monastery. Witnesses says that the mob attacked the Benedictines and desecrated a cross and a statue of Jesus.

Six Benedictines were badly injured, including one who was beaten to unconsciousness. Police prevented him from being hospitalized.

Sources say the attacks were due to a long-time land dispute between the government and the monks over pine forests on the Benedictine's land.

Archbishop Linh, who became archbishop of Hue Archdiocese last October, said Catholics — who recall massacres perpetrated by northern communists in 1968 — don't dare speak up for the Benedictines.

The church official, who visited the monastery on June 16, said Benedictine monks asked the Archbishop's House to support their efforts to reclaim their properties.

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## **Vietnamese pastor punished for 'reports' to US diplomats; Catholic blogger to be expelled to France**



Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh (USCIRF)

WorldWatchMonitor (15.06.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2rxYjAm> - A pastor imprisoned in south-east Vietnam is being further punished for telling a visiting U.S. diplomatic delegation about abuses he has suffered.

Nguyen Cong Chinh, serving an 11-year sentence for “undermining national solidarity” by religious activities with ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, met US consular officials in Ho Chi Minh City on 25 May. He told them about shards of glass being put into his food, and enduring corporal punishment and humiliation because, he said, he refused to do what prison officers require.

Immediately after the US delegation left the prison, Chinh was isolated from other prisoners and put into a cramped space, according to his wife, Tran Thi Hong, who saw him on 7 June.

Hong accused Vietnamese officials of using “shameful and divisive tactics” to put pressure on her husband when she discovered, during a visit on 11 May, that he had been told that she had been unfaithful.

Hong, a mother of four, was herself tortured, beaten and questioned at a police station for two months after she too met a U.S. delegation on religious freedom in March 2016 in Pleiku city, Central Highlands.

Vietnam has 83 prisoners of religious freedom behind bars, reported BPSOS, a U.S.-based NGO on June 6.

Meanwhile [Radio Free Asia](#) reports that Cambodia has repatriated 16 Montagnard asylum seekers to Vietnam after they failed to meet its requirements for refugee status. The Montagnards are some 30 tribes of indigenous people from Vietnam's Central Highlands, where Nguyen Cong Chinh was based.

Many Montagnards practice forms of evangelical Protestantism, putting them at odds with Vietnam's communist rulers who tightly control religion.

In 2001, Vietnamese troops crushed hill tribe protests in the Central Highlands, prompting an exodus of Montagnards. Hanoi routinely asks Cambodia to return those who flee.

The 16 were handed over to the Vietnamese authorities on 8 June. They were accompanied by officials from the UNHCR who arranged their return. The Montagnards were not deported but "voluntarily agreed to return while the UN was making arrangements for them", according to Tan Sovichea, a Cambodian immigration spokesman.

He added that the UNHCR had been working with Vietnamese authorities to ensure that the Montagnards would be safely returned and protected from persecution for their attempt to flee the country. Montagnards sent back by Cambodia in the past have been questioned and beaten up.

When contacted by Radio Free Asia, the UNHCR in Cambodia was not available for comment, but it was expected that their officials would continue with the Montagnards and Vietnamese authorities to where the would-be asylum seekers would be settled.

Since 2001 at least 3,000 Vietnamese Montagnards have sought refugee status in Cambodia. Without refugee status, Montagnards in Cambodia rely on the good will and help of NGOs and churches.

Some Christians were among a group of more than 50 Montagnard asylum seekers who fled Cambodia to Thailand in early 2017 amid fears of forced repatriation. However, as Thailand and Cambodia are not signatories to the different international treaties that deal with the status of refugees, [Montagnards become classified as 'undocumented economic migrants' with no rights or status](#) regardless of their registration with the UNHCR.

### ***Vietnam to expel Catholic blogger***

Also, the Vietnamese government's plan to deport an outspoken Catholic blogger has been condemned by Reporters Without Borders (RWB), the international organisation campaigning for press freedom.

Peter Pham Minh Hoang, who posted writings about education, environmental issues and threats to Vietnam's sovereignty from China which led to a 17-month prison sentence and three years of house arrest in 2011, has dual Vietnamese and French citizenship. On June 1 was told he is due to be deported to France.

Hoang, a university lecturer who acquired his French citizenship during many years in France, has been the target of both psychological and judicial harassment since his return to Vietnam in 2000, stated RWB on June 7.

However he has offered to renounce his French citizenship, saying that he will retain only his Vietnamese citizenship.

"My expectation is to live and die in my homeland," he said. His wife takes care of her elderly mother and disabled brother. "Our family must be separated" if he is expelled, he states.

A spokesperson for France-based RWB said Vietnam's decision "is typical of the blatant way they harass all those who raise controversial issues".

Vietnam's first ever law on religions since it was re-unified under communist rule in 1975 will come into effect in January 2018.

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## **Jailed Vietnamese pastor punished after US visit**

### ***Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh confined after describing harsh prison treatment to American officials***

UCANews (13.06.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2sso9Ww> - An evangelical pastor imprisoned in southeast Vietnam is being held in a cramped confined space as punishment for telling a visiting U.S. diplomatic delegation about abuses he has suffered.

Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh gave officials from the U.S. Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City details on May 25 on how officials have treated him at Xuan Loc Prison, Dong Nai Province, said his wife Tran Thi Hong.

"Chinh said on the previous day, prison officials informed him about the meeting and asked him not to tell the visitors anything that would make them look bad," said Hong who visited her husband June 7.

"Chinh could not obey their order," she said. "He told the delegation his experiences of torture, threats and mistreatment that he has endured over six years." The pastor has been kept in three prisons since being arrested in 2011.

He told the U.S. consulate staff that prison officials have put shards of glass into his food, subjected him to corporal punishment such as beatings and being put in stocks, have humiliated him and put him in solitary confinement, she said.

The pastor has been subjected to these types of abuses because he refuses to do what prison officials require, she said.

Immediately after the U.S. delegation left the prison, Chinh was confined in the cramped space and isolated from other inmates, said his wife.

"I am very concerned about his poor health in solitary confinement because he is suffering severe sinusitis and high blood pressure," she said.

Hong, mother of four, was herself tortured, beaten and questioned at a police station for two months after she met with a U.S. delegation on religious freedom in March 2016 in Pleiku city.

Chinh was sentenced to 11 years in 2011 for providing religious activities to ethnic groups in the Central Highlands.

Vietnam has 83 prisoners of religious freedom behind bars, reported BPSOS, a U.S.-based NGO on June 6.

[Watch Jackie Wolcott from the U.S. Commission of International Religious Freedom speak out on behalf of Chinh and Hong in the USCIRF09 video here.](#)

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## **Open Letter from USCIRF Commissioner Jackie Wolcott to Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh and Mrs. Tran Thi Hong**

USCIRF (15.05.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2qNV5Ir> - Commissioner Jackie Wolcott sent the following letter to Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh and Mrs. Tran Thi Hong on May 15, 2017.

May 15, 2017

Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh  
Xuan Loc Prison  
Dong Nai Province, Vietnam

Mrs. Tran Thi Hong  
Hoa Lu Ward, Pleiku City,  
Gia Lai Province, Vietnam

Dear Pastor Chinh and Mrs. Hong:

I write to you as a Commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and a person of faith who is deeply concerned about your well-being. I want to express my Commission's and my own support and solidarity with you as you continue your struggles in support of religious freedom. Your plight rightfully has drawn the attention of people worldwide.

This is a poignant time to highlight your struggle. Twelve years ago this month, the United States and Vietnam reached an agreement requiring the Vietnamese government to improve religious freedom conditions in your country. Sadly, and as you know all too well, this agreement largely has been followed by more restrictions, not more freedom.

Tragically, Pastor Chinh, your detention for more than five years of your 11-year prison sentence is clearly and completely unjust. I understand that the Vietnamese authorities are denying you vitally needed medical treatment as you serve prison time for the alleged crime of "undermining national solidarity." As a minister to the Christian community in the Central Highlands, the government should protect, not punish, your voice for peaceful criticism of restrictions on religious freedom.

Mrs. Hong, we understand that you too have been subjected to frequent government surveillance and harassment, including one year ago this month when Vietnamese police officers harshly interrogated you, burst into your home and assaulted your son. Please know that I will not forget your family's ill-treatment.

As a religious freedom advocate myself, I have been deeply inspired by both of you and your resiliency under these cruel conditions. As long as you remain in prison, Pastor, and as long as the Vietnamese authorities continue to unfairly treat you and your family, please be assured that I am dedicated to publicly and privately working on your behalf, so that your family can be reunited and you can freely practice your faith, openly and without further threat.

With deepest respect,

Ambassador Jackie Wolcott

Ambassador Jackie Wolcott is a Commissioner at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a U.S. government body that monitors the universal right to religious freedom.

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## **Amnesty International group in US sends 70 letters to EP delegation to Vietnam calling for the release of Buddhist dissident Thích Quảng Độ**

Quê Mẹ (02.28.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2lyV1WO> - In preparation for a visit to Vietnam by the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights from 20-24 February 2017, members of Amnesty International in Boston launched a letter-writing campaign to urge the EP delegation to press for the release of prominent Buddhist dissident Thích Quảng Độ, Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), currently under house arrest in Saigon.

Alvin Jacobson, who coordinated the campaign, informed the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) that he sent a parcel of 70 individually signed letters to Pier Antonio Panzeri, Chairman of the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights and head of the delegation to Vietnam to his office at the European Parliament in Brussels before the delegation's departure to Hanoi.

Describing Thích Quảng Độ as "a man who reflects all that is best in human rights", the letter called for his "religious freedom from government control" and "unconditional and immediate release".

*"Notwithstanding years of imprisonment, both actual and under "house arrest", oppression of religious and political beliefs and convictions, screening and surveillance of all outside contacts, and limited access to health services, he has nevertheless become an international symbol and inspiration for religious freedom and non-violence", the letter said.*

As case coordinator at Amnesty International's Group 56 (Lexington, Massachusetts) for Thích Quảng Độ and his predecessor, the late UBCV Patriarch Thích Huyền Quang for the past 14 years, Alvin Jacobson said that his group had "written hundreds, if not thousands, of letters to Vietnamese government officials, former President Obama, the Department of State, our congressional delegation, and to US based corporations doing business in Vietnam".

He appealed to Mr. Panzeri and the EP Human Rights Subcommittee to take urgent action to solve this tragic case : "Regrettably, Thich Huyen Quang died while still under pagoda arrest and unless something extraordinary can be accomplished very soon, the same fate is likely to be that of Thich Quang Do - an 88 year-old man in failing health".

During their trip, the EP delegation did ask to visit Thích Quảng Độ, but were told that it was "too far to travel". At a Press Conference before leaving Hanoi, they called on Vietnam to "put an end to religious persecutions" and said it would be "extremely difficult" to ratify the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement without improvements in Vietnam's human rights record.

*Please see below to read this article in French.*

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## Une section américaine d'Amnesty International envoie 70 lettres à la délégation du Parlement Européen pour la libération du dissident bouddhiste Thích Quảng Độ

Quê Mỹ (28.02.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2mFamFU> - En prévision de la visite au Vietnam de la Sous-Commission « droits de l'Homme » du Parlement Européen, les membres d'Amnesty International de Boston avaient lancé une campagne de lettres pour demander à la délégation européenne de faire pression pour la libération du célèbre dissident vietnamien Thích Quảng Độ, Patriarche de l'Église Bouddhique Unifiée du Vietnam (EBUV), qui est actuellement en résidence surveillée à Saïgon.

Alvin Jacobson, qui a coordonné la campagne, a informé le Comité Vietnam pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (VCHR) qu'il avait envoyé un colis comprenant 70 lettres individuelles à Pier Antonio Panzeri, Président de la Sous-Commission « droits de l'Homme » du Parlement Européen et chef de la délégation en visite au Vietnam, à son bureau à Bruxelles, avant son départ pour Hanoi.

Décrivant Thích Quảng Độ comme « un homme qui reflète tout ce qui est de meilleur dans les droits de l'Homme », les lettres en appellent au respect « de sa liberté religieuse [exempt] du contrôle du gouvernement » et à sa « libération inconditionnelle et immédiate ».

*« Malgré des années de détention, en prison ou en « résidence surveillée », d'oppression de ses croyances et opinions politiques et religieuses, de contrôle et de surveillance de tous ses contacts avec l'extérieur, et d'accès limité aux soins médicaux, il n'en est pas moins devenu un symbole international et une source d'inspiration [pour la lutte en faveur de ] la liberté religieuse et la non-violence », dit la lettre.*

En tant que coordonnateur du Groupe 56 d'Amnesty International (Lexington, Massachusetts), en charge de Thích Quảng Độ et de son prédécesseur, feu le Patriarche de l'EBUV Thích Huyền Quang, pendant les 14 dernières années, Alvin Jacobson a rapporté que son groupe avait « écrit des centaines, si ce ne sont des milliers, de lettres aux membres du gouvernement vietnamien, à l'ancien Président Obama, au Département d'État, à nos représentants au Congrès et aux entreprises américaines opérant au Vietnam ».

Il a souligné auprès de M. Panzeri le besoin urgent d'une action forte du Parlement Européen : « Malheureusement, Thich Huyen Quang est décédé alors qu'il était toujours détenu dans sa pagode et à moins que quelque chose d'extraordinaire ne soit accompli très vite, le même sort attend probablement Thich Quang Do — un homme âgé de 88 ans à la santé déclinante ».

Lors de son voyage, la délégation du PE a demandé à rencontrer Thích Quảng Độ, mais les autorités vietnamiennes ont répondu qu'il se trouvait « trop loin ». Lors de sa conférence de presse, la veille du départ de Hanoi, la délégation européenne a appelé le Vietnam à « mettre fin aux persécutions religieuses » et déclaré qu'il serait « extrêmement difficile » de ratifier l'Accord de libre-échange UE-Vietnam sans amélioration de la situation des droits de l'Homme au Vietnam.

*Please see above to read this article in English.*

## USCIRF Assesses State Department's CPC Removal

USCIRF (08.02.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2me47eX> - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today released *Religious Freedom in Vietnam: Assessing the Country of Particular Concern Designation 10 Years After its Removal*.

Because of its "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" violations of religious freedom, Vietnam had been designated a "country of particular concern" (or CPC) by the State Department from 2004 until 2006, when, as a result of U.S. diplomatic negotiations, Vietnam promised to improve religious freedom.

This new report examines the history and efficacy of Vietnam's CPC designation and the implication on religious freedom in Vietnam 10 years after the State Department removed Vietnam as a "country of particular concern."

*"Ten years after the State Department's removal of Vietnam as a CPC, religious freedom conditions in the country are at a pivotal moment. While these conditions have improved in some instances, severe religious violations continue that are inconsistent with international standards,"* said USCIRF Chair Thomas J. Reese, S.J. *"Although the Vietnamese government sought to address these concerns in the recently passed law on religion and belief, this measure is imperfect and disadvantages many religious communities. If Vietnam does not implement religious freedom reforms that are consistent with international standards, USCIRF will continue to call for its designation as a country of particular concern."*

Religious freedom conditions in many parts of Vietnam continue to deteriorate in some areas, notwithstanding that many individuals and communities freely practice their faith. In some areas, local authorities harass and discriminate against religious organizations that the government does not recognize. In addition, religious groups across Vietnam fear that the government will evict them from or demolish their properties. USCIRF has recommended CPC designation for Vietnam every year since 2002.

To view the report in English, [please click here](#). To view the report in Vietnamese, please [click here](#). For more information on religious freedom conditions in Vietnam, please see USCIRF's Vietnam chapter in the 2016 Annual Report (in [English](#) and [Vietnamese](#)).

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## Religious freedom in Vietnam assessing the country of particular concern designation 10 years after its removal

USCIRF (February 2017) - <http://bit.ly/2kpukmN> - On November 13, 2006, the U.S. Department of State (State Department) lifted Vietnam's designation as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, after only 26 months. The lifting of the designation acknowledged the Vietnamese government's actions to improve religious freedom, and the speed and the method by which it was achieved—diplomatic activity—remain noteworthy a decade later.

The 10-year anniversary of the lifting of the CPC designation is marked by Hanoi's Law on Belief and Religion, adopted by the National Assembly on November 18, 2016. The measure contains some positive language, and as of this writing, the Vietnamese government was disseminating the law nationwide. The new law will: extend legal personality to some religious organizations; reduce the time that religious organizations must wait for government registration; encourage the establishment of religious schools or other educational facilities; and transition some government approvals to notifications, for example, regarding clergy and certain religious activities. However, many religious



organizations and international observers view the law as fundamentally flawed because it will increase the government's control over religious life and make activities it deems "illegal" subject to the force of law. The law also will limit freedom of religion or belief through vaguely worded and broadly interpreted national security provisions.

This contrast characterizes religious freedom in Vietnam today: modest improvements paired with repressive government control. To be sure, the freedom to practice one's faith or beliefs in Vietnam has come a long way since the dark days following the 1975 communist takeover. Many individuals and religious communities are able to exercise their religion or belief freely, openly, and without fear. To its credit, the Vietnamese government has made a concerted effort to improve conditions in a number of ways. For example, the government is creating more space for religious organizations to conduct charitable work and taking steps to improve relations with the Vatican. In many communities, religious organizations and local officials get along well, with little to no interference by the latter. And the government solicited limited public input on its religion law, a move that would have been unheard of just a few years ago.

Nevertheless, the Vietnamese government's complicity in or indifference to egregious violations of religious freedom in many parts of the country is deeply troubling. In some areas, local authorities harass and discriminate against religious organizations that do not have government recognition, and in others, they threaten religious followers with eviction from or demolition of their places of worship or other religious buildings—in some instances carrying out these threats. Law enforcement officials continue to detain, arrest, and/or imprison individuals due to their religious beliefs or religious freedom advocacy. The scope and scale of these violations make clear that Vietnam still is a long way from respecting the universal right to freedom of religion or belief as defined by international law and covenants.

Of all the countries the U.S. government has designated as CPCs, Vietnam is unique in that it is the only one removed from the CPC list due to diplomatic activity. This raises several questions: Why was Vietnam first designated as a CPC? What was different about this designation that led to Vietnam's swift removal from the list? If the strategy was a success in de-listing Vietnam, why has it not been replicated in other countries? This paper examines the history and efficacy of Vietnam's CPC designation, ultimately arguing it should be re-designated...

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

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