

VIETNAM: Leader of banned Vietnam Buddhist sect expelled from Thanh Minh Zen monastery

Radio Free Asia (08.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2ElvSNa> – A high-profile human rights activist and supreme patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) has been expelled from the Thanh Minh Zen monastery in Ho Chi Minh City, where he had been under house arrest since 2003, supporters said.

Thich Quang Do had been under extreme state surveillance while interned at the monastery for practicing his religion and being an advocate of religious freedom and democracy.

In a statement, the International Buddhist Information Bureau (IBIB) said that the 91-year-old patriarch had been asked on Sept. 15 to leave the monastery by its superior monk Thích Thanh Minh as his presence had become a distraction to the daily operations of the monastery.

The Vietnamese government, which does not recognize the church, had been trying to move Thich Quang Do out of the monastery for the past two years, and he vowed to stay unless asked to leave by the superior monk himself.

Once the monk made the request, the patriarch left

immediately, moving from one pagoda to another within the city with no long term living arrangements. He then boarded a train for his native Thai Binh province in the north.

Speaking to RFA's Vietnamese service, IBIB director Vo Van Ai explained the various difficulties that the intrusive police presence caused the monastery during the patriarch's house arrest.

"People don't want to visit the monastery because they are afraid of being monitored by the police. They even took pictures of everyone visiting the monastery," he said.

Vo said that life inside the monastery had been "just like a prison" for the elderly patriarch.

"There is a police checkpoint right at the front of the monastery so they can watch him closely. Even when they let him out to visit the hospital, police would follow him," Vo said.

The IBIB is concerned that in the remote northern province, Thich Quang Do will have limited access to communications, health care and visits from UBCV followers.

Vo quoted Thich Quang Do as saying he intended to carry on with his religious practice in his hometown.

"The church is still the same. It is only when I die that I can't work for the church. I can't leave the church," Vo quoted the patriarch as saying in an Oct. 5 telephone call.

Reported and translated by RFA's Vietnamese Service. Written in English by Eugene Whong.

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