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VIETNAM: Ahead of Biden visit, Vietnam backsliding on religious freedoms

VIETNAM: Ahead of Biden visit, US watchdog says Vietnam backsliding on religious freedoms

Reuters (06.09.2023) – Days before a visit by President Joe Biden to Vietnam in which he aims to upgrade diplomatic ties, a U.S. government commission accused the country of backsliding on commitments to ensure religious freedoms.

In a report on Tuesday, the U.S. Commission on International

Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said that since Washington dropped Vietnam from a list of “countries of particular concern” (CPC) over religious freedom in 2006, the Hanoi government had created “more space in some areas” for expressions of belief.

However, a “recent crackdown on civil society, increased pressure on independent religious communities, alarming reports of forced renunciations of faith, and other growing religious freedom violations add up to a clear reversal in that once-positive trajectory,” it said.

The report said a May visit to Vietnam by USCIRF Vice Chair Frederick Davie and Commissioner Eric Ueland found that while religious groups experienced relatively greater freedom in urban areas, “serious challenges are pervasive in many rural areas.”

Vietnam’s requirement for religious groups to register contrasted with Hanoi’s obligation to provide religious freedom to all its people, it said.

“Government authorities continue to closely monitor all religious activity, often harassing, detaining, or otherwise preventing unregistered faith communities from exercising their fundamental right to religious freedom,” the report said.

Vietnam was on a “similar trajectory to China in terms of its regulation and control of religion,” the report said.

Washington sees Vietnam as an important partner in the face of China’s growing power in the Indo-Pacific region. It is looking to elevate its diplomatic relations with Hanoi to the top level when Biden is in Hanoi on Sept. 10, but analysts say human rights concerns could be an obstacle to certain cooperation.

Vietnam’s constitution allows for freedom of religion and government media have rejected criticisms from groups such as

USCIRF.

In its 2023 annual report, the USCIRF recommended the redesignation of Vietnam as a CPC, accusing it of “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.”

Last year, the U.S. State Department added Vietnam to its Special Watch List for violations of religious freedom under the 1998 U.S. Religious Freedom Act, a lesser designation than that of a CPC, but its first since 2006.

The act provides for a range of policy responses, including sanctions or waivers, but they are not automatic.

Reporting by David Brunnstrom; Editing by Leslie Adler

HRWF additional information:

77 FoRB Prisoners in Vietnam

Christians – Catholics (11)

A JEN

A KUIN

A TACH

A TIK

DINH KUH

HO DUC HOA

JU

KUNH

LUP

RUN

RUNH

Christians – Protestants (28)

A DAO

DINH NONG

DINH YUM

KPUIH KHUONG

KSOR KAM

KSOR PHIT

KSOR PUP

KSOR RUK

PUIH BOP

RAH LAN HIP

RAH LAN RAH

RMAH BLOANH

RMAH KHIL

RO LAN KLY

RO MA DAIH

RO MAH PLA

RO MAH THEM

SIU CHON

SIU DIK

SIU DOANG

SIU HLOM

SUNG A KHUA

Y HRIAM KPA

Y MIN KSOR

Y PUM BYA

Y TUP KNUL

Y WO NIE

Y YICH

Buddhists – Hoa Hao (6)

BUI VAN THAM

BUI THI BICH TUYEN

BUI VAN TRUNG

LE THI HONG HANH

NGUYEN BAC TRUYEN

NGUYEN HOANG NAM

Buddhists – Unspecified (28)

CAO THI CUC

DO THI HONG

DOAN DINH NAM

DOAN VAN CU

LE DUC DONG

LE DUY LOC

LE PHUC

LE THANH HOAN NGUYEN

LE THANH NHAT NGUYEN

LE THANH NHI NGUYEN

LE THANH TRUNG DUONG

LE TRONG CU

LE TUNG VAN

LUONG NHAT QUANG

NGUYEN DINH

NGUYEN KY LAC

NGUYEN THAI BINH

PHAN THANH TUONG

PHAN THANH Y

PHAN VAN THU

TA KHU

TRAN PHI DUNG

TRAN QUAN

VO NGOC CU

VO THANH LE

TU THIEN LUONG

VO TIET

VUONG TAN SON

Duong Van Minh Religion (4)

DUONG VAN LANH

DUONG VAN TU

LY VAN DUNG

LY XUAN ANH

Photo: U.S. President Joe Biden arrives at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Washington, U.S.,

[Further reading about FORB in Vietnam on HRWF website](#)

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