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## **Vietnam monks reject state-run TV station's accusations**

*Benedictines say the report is offensive and that they have proof of ownership of disputed land.*

By Hue

UCA News (28.08.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3hJ3uDN> – Benedictine monks in central Vietnam have asked a government-run television station's officials to deal with a documentary which wrongly accused them of invading land.

On Aug. 17, state-run Radio and Television Station based in

Thua Thien Hue province aired a documentary titled "Some monks at Thien An Monastery appropriate land and distort the truth," which reported that on Aug. 10-11 concerned people with banners gathered at pine forests at Thuy Bang Commune to demand some monks stop cutting down pines and invading land illegally.

The 6.5-minute documentary said the pine forests are managed by the commune and accused some monks of regularly shouting at and offending people.

Newscaster Nguyen Thi Diem My, who presented the documentary, said the monks posted videos and writings with untrue contents on social media, vilifying government authorities and police for posing as members of the public, terrorizing and hurting the monks' dignity.

Benedictine monks said the film "has untrue contents, gravely offends us and follows the provincial government's sponsoring of public security officers, police and gangsters who posed as the people and illegally broke into the monastery on Aug. 10-11."

They said they have absolute proof of ownership of the 107-hectare plot of land including facilities and pine forests since 1940. After 1975, when Vietnam came under communist rule, the monks never donated, ceded or offered their land to any individuals or organizations.

They said they have petitioned local government authorities

many times to return the land they had “borrowed.”

The Benedictines rejected the fact that Nguyen Viet Ton was interviewed in the film saying that his family had lived in the area for three generations.

The monks said Ton’s grandfather Nguyen Viet Doan was an orphan who moved to the commune in 1960 and Ton’s father Nguyen Viet Cu was given material support and a plot of land to cultivate for a living by the monks.

They said they have not received any documents from the local government stating that they grabbed the land. They said it is the state-run Tien Phong forestry company that is responsible for appropriating their land and refusing to return it.

They said the television station’s accusations violate the country’s press laws and destroy the monks’ dignity.

“More seriously, the documentary’s wrong contents cause bad public opinions across the country and abroad, and lose public trust in the state’s media,” Father Andrew Trong Nguyen Van Tam, the monastery’s superior, said in an Aug. 23 letter to Nguyen Van Du, director of the station.

Father Tam invited Du and Diem My to meet the monks at their monastery on Sept. 1 so that the monks could give accurate information and feedback.

He said the monks would also invite some individuals and organizations who invaded their land and pine forests to meet them on that day.

“We would like to receive cooperation from you to deal with the case legally and objectively,” Father Tam said, adding that if they do not come, the monks will petition the local government to deal with the case.

Sources said local authorities had removed a barbed-wire fence they erected on Aug. 13 from the controversial land.

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