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## **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

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## Vietnam tries to force ethnic minority church members to recant faith

*Vietnam has reversed progress on religious freedom, US group says.*

[RFA](#) (08.09.2023) - In the video that went viral in Vietnam recently, a police officer forbids a church member of a group not recognized by the government from joining online services – and threatens his family members if he doesn't obey.

"Now, I must tell you the following: I forbid you to access Zoom to learn religious dogma and laws and listen to or follow [church founder] Klao Jer Vue," said Doan Xuan Nam, head of the Bac Ha police department in northern Vietnam.

"Can you do it? If not, your wife and children must be careful," he says. "The village won't allow you access to its water resources."

The incident involving the God Loves Us Church highlights Vietnam's continued restrictions on religious freedom, which is guaranteed in its constitution.

In fact, Vietnam has reversed modest progress and become more oppressive in this regard, the U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom said on Tuesday, ahead of U.S. President Joe Biden's weekend visit to Hanoi.

Recent "crackdowns 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.

Requirements that religious groups register with authorities also goes against Hanoi's commitment to religious freedom, the report 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," it said.

### **Monitored and harassed**

The video depicting the threats against the family of Giang A. Chu, ethnic Hmongs from Bac Ha district in the northern province of Lao Cai, was filmed on March 29, but spread on social media only recently.

Since that warning was issued, Chu's family told RFA Vietnamese that police set up a checkpoint near their home and two or three security staff are stationed there around the clock.

Police also confiscated their mobile phones and returned them only after deleting all the apps they were using to watch online services. Also, the family's power generator, which was installed in a stream nearby, was stolen in early May, and they don't know the perpetrators.

According to a report by Chang A Pao, a leader in the God Loves Us organization, local authorities have regularly harassed adherents for many years, including a recent incident at Pao's home in Lai Chau province.

On August 27, 2023, a group of local police officers and public servants came to his home to disperse his fellow adherents from a gathering.

"That Sunday, government officers of provincial, district and commune levels came and banned us from practicing the religion together," another group leader, Sung Phai Ta, who was among the attendees at Pao's house, told RFA.

Local authorities then arrested four people, including Vang Ca Lung, Chang A Pao, Sung Va Hoa, and Vang Thi May, Ta said.

They even forced one of them – Hoa – to sign a declaration renouncing his faith, Ta said, but he refused.

"Once they put him down on the ground, he came back to the house, and then they carried him out again," said Ta. "They did it three times!"

### **Asked to recant faith**

Since 2017, many followers of the religious group have been invited to police stations to sign statements renouncing their faith, a letter from one of its members, Thao A Chang, to both the Government Committee for Religious Affairs and the U.S. Embassy to Vietnam.

Under pressure from local authorities and police, 103 out of a total of 794 followers recanted, the letter said.

Vietnamese authorities consider the God Loves Us Church to teach heresy, and accuse its leader, Vu Thi Do, who lives in Wisconsin and is also known as Klao Jer Vue, of separatism.

She has been "using the Internet to disseminate content and information that divides the great national unity, encourages the idea of separatism and self-rule, and calls for the establishment of a 'separate state,' according to a post on Lai Chau Provincial Police's website on Aug. 15.

"The Vietnamese state-owned media does not know the truth," Vu Thi Do said in an email to RFA. "They accused us of attacking orthodox religions and committing other bad things as if we were a bad political organization plotting to overthrow the government."

She said the government paid other Hmong people to bear false witness against the church.

"Our followers in Vietnam don't sabotage the government's assets or violate the central government's rules and regulations," she said. "Meanwhile, local authorities come to our members' homes, threaten to put them in jail, confiscate their cell phones, laptops and even destroy their food."

She also said all the information about her church published by state-owned media was wrong and the crackdown against it should come to an end.

"Abuse and violation of civic rights should be stopped," she said. "Hmong people are Vietnamese citizens. They should be treated fairly and equally as other Vietnamese."

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## Authorities attack Buddhist community during religious ceremony

***A Khmer Krom Buddhist gathering was attacked by Vietnamese authorities during a ceremony at Chedey temple in Tap Son village, Tra Cu district, Tra Vinh province in southern Vietnam on 4 June.***

[CSW](#) (13.06.2023) - The ceremony, held by the Khmer-Krom community to pay respect to their ancestors, was disrupted by approximately ten representatives of the Vietnamese authorities at 9:40am local time. The perpetrators did not wear uniforms and are thought to have come from outside the village.

The authorities reportedly physically attacked approximately ten community members, including two Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks.

Voice of Kampuchea Krom (VOKK) and the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF), global organisations that advocate for the rights of the Khmer Krom people, shared [footage](#) of the attack on social media and [called](#) on the international community to apply pressure on the Vietnamese authorities to bring an end to violations against the Khmer Krom community.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: ***'Reports of a violent attack on Chedey temple in Tra Vinh province are deeply concerning and yet another incident in a worrying pattern of [persistent targeting of ethnic and religious minorities](#) in Vietnam. CSW urges the Vietnam authorities to immediately cease all harassment of Khmer-Krom Buddhists and other religious groups across the country.'***

### Note to Editors:

1. The Khmer Krom are ethnically [Khmer people](#) living in or from the region of Tây Nam Bộ in southwest Vietnam (Mekong Delta).

*Photo: Khmer Krom Buddhists gathered in front of Chedey temple in Tap Son village*

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