

VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

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October 29, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

We are writing to you, Mr. President, to express our deepest concern, nay dismay, at the U.S. State Department's refusal on Monday, October 26, to put Vietnam back onto the list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) in spite of mounting evidence of gross violations of religious freedom by the Vietnamese government in recent years and months. What this does is only to show the increasing gaping discrepancy between the Executive Branch's position and that of the Legislative and human rights organizations respected for their integrity and objectivity (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, and especially the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom).

Since its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 2007, Vietnam has instituted ever tougher state control over all print and electronic media, including blocking Internet access and jamming the signals of Radio Free Asia. Violations of freedom of religion in 2009 are quite alarming. They include the following actions, among others:

- There is a persistent pattern of intimidation and persecution of Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, a prominent Mennonite leader of the House Churches in the Central Highland region;
- Catholic priests and their followers in Hanoi, Hue, and Dong Hoi have been assaulted by police during their peaceful vigils against the government's illegal expropriation of Church lands;
- Since June of this year, police in Lam Dong Province have used thugs to attack the monks and nuns at Bat Nha monastery, all disciples of world famous Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, forcing them to vacate from this place last week.

In 2004, Vietnam was cited as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) because of its severe violations of religious freedom. In 2006, the US State Department removed Vietnam from the list citing improvements in the freedom of religion.

The lifting of Vietnam's CPC status by the US State Department was deemed premature by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. After a fact finding trip to Vietnam in May 2009, the Commission recommended once again that

the State Department reinstate Vietnam on the list, stating that “Vietnam’s overall human rights record remains poor, and has deteriorated since Vietnam joined WTO in January 2007.” This is a stance approved by many U.S. representatives and even senators in Congress, who have repeatedly called for the same.

Mr. President, the whole world and the people of Vietnam are looking up to you for your leadership. It would be a sad day to see that the U.S., the “land of the free and the brave,” can no longer be counted upon to lead in this matter of democratic freedoms and human rights. Please take the US Commission on International Religious Freedom’s recommendation by naming Vietnam as a “Country of Particular Concern”.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tung', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Nguyen Ba Tung, DPA
President
Vietnam Human Rights Network

Cc: Mr. Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.