

On-going Brutal Suppression of the Cultural Rights of Hmong Christians

(Prepared by BPSOS – November 20, 2013)

We would like to bring to the attention of the UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights the gross violations of the cultural rights of Hmong Christians that are going on in Vietnam.

In 2008 the government launched an aggressive campaign to force Hmong Christians to end their cultural way of disposing their dead, forcing them to return to the old practices of leaving the corpse of loved ones in their living quarters for seven days and seven nights. The old practice also mandated that buffalos and cows be killed and offered to the dead. Already struggling financially, this practice was harmful to the livelihood of Hmong families.

In 1989, a Hmong Christian leader by the name Duong Van Minh called on his people to drop these old practices; instead the corpse should be kept away from the residence. He also advocated against killing cattle to offer to the dead, and for simple, inexpensive funeral rituals. He soon attracted many followers.

Hmong villagers started to build small storage facilities (about 2 square meters each) to store funeral accessories that the entire village could share. In 2008 the authorities of the provinces of Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Thai Nguyen and Tuyen Quang started to force these Hmong to return to the unhygienic, costly funeral rituals of the past. The police joined forces with the militia, members of the people's committees and thugs to demolish the funeral storage facilities.

In 2012 a number of Hmong villagers rebuilt some of these funeral storage facilities. Again the government sent in the plain-clothed police and thugs to destroy these facilities and arrested a number of Hmong villagers. Hmong villagers who used their own bodies to protect these facilities were met with violence.

The video below covers multiple the police assaults, including the police raid conducted in the dead of night, at 4:45 am, on April 9, 2013 at Luong Ga Village, Vang Dinh Hamlet, Ha Quang District, Cao Bang Province; the police raid conducted at 10:00 am on April 9, 2013 at Bo Dich Block, Quoc Toan Village, Tra Linh Hamlet, where villagers including women were shocked with electric batons until they passed out; the police raid at 9:00 am on April 8, 2013 in Luong Dien Hamlet, Na Phac Town, Ngan Son, Bac Kan Province where the police in civilian clothes used electric batons in their assault and took away eight villagers; and the police raid conducted in Ba Lam, Hoa An where the villagers successfully defended their funeral storage facility.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwS8TxiCYyo>

Other incidents of demolition of funeral storage facilities of the Hmong people that were caught on video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Fy3gR4OSGM&noredirect=1#t=123>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InVMeUilbgM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwmMMbrpUOQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GooyJz3DOY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DXGJa5UK3s&feature=share>

On October 15, 2013, the security forces of Tuyen Quang Province ordered the arrest of two Hmong “suspects” Thao Quan Mua and Hoang Van Sang in relation to the cultural transformation movement started by Duong Van Minh: http://thanhtra.com.vn/bat-2-doi-tuong-thuoc-to-chuc-duong-van-minh_t221c1144n65551.html.

As the police escalated their assaults and as many of the Hmong’s petitions to the central government remained unanswered, in early October 2013 a number of Hmong villagers from the said four provinces came to Ha Noi to appeal to the government. They camped out in the Mai Xuan Thuong Park. Some came to ask the central government to intervene and stop the provincial authorities from forcing Hmong villagers to return to the old mourning and funeral practices. Others came to look for relatives who had been taken away and held incognito by the police. Yet others demanded the release of their leader Duong Van Minh who had been reportedly arrested. It was also reported that he suffered certain illness and had to be hospitalized.

Videos of Hmong petitioners camping out in Ha Noi:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfTkkW98EvY>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IceXHQsos_Y





On October 23, the police of Thuy Khue Ward violently dispersed the gathering and drove the protesters away in police vans. The police confiscated all their personal belongings. A Hmong adult (Duong Van Phung) and a child (Hoang Thi Vang) suffered injuries caused by electric batons used by the police. They passed out and had to be hospitalized.



The police rounded a number of Hmong protesters and drove them to the government' Reception Center at 1 Ngo Thi Nham, Ha Dong District, Ha Noi where they were locked up: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cBpH10WOG>. Many Hmongs were later transported to Cao Bang Province. Some were taken away and not seen again.

On October 27 a number of Hmong protesters returned to Ha Noi to reclaim their personal belongings from the police and look for their loved ones who had been taken away by the police. They also demanded investigation into police brutality. The police moved in and again took them to the central government's Reception Center at 1 Ngo Thi Nham, Ha Dong. They were later transported to the provinces where they came from.

RFA reports (in Vietnamese) on the Hmongs' demonstration in Ha Noi:

http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/hmong-petiti-in-hanoi-10242013053315.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=Hmong

http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/hmong-petition-update-10272013060357.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=Hmong