

ADDENDUM

To the

**STATEMENT OF
HMONG NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, INC. (HND)**

For the Hearing on

**“PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN
VIETNAM”**

**TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

March 26, 2014

Additional Human Rights Violations Against the Hmong in Vietnam

I. Additional Examples of Religious Persecution of Hmong Christians

A. Forced Renunciation of Faith

In 2010 and 2011 there were multiple instances in which local officials in Dien Bien forced Hmong Protestants to renounce their faith through methods such as fines, beatings, threats of property confiscation and expulsion, and even death threats: As noted by USCIRF in its 2011 Annual Report:

- “In June 2010, several Hmong Protestants from Trung Phu village, Na Son Commune, Dien Bien Dong district, Dien Bien province were threatened with death and beaten severely unless they renounced their faith”
- “In June 2010, 25 individuals from Ban Xa Fi #1, Xa Xa Tong, Huyen Muang Dien Bien Dong, Dien Bien province were threatened with confiscation of property and beatings unless they gave up Protestantism. The leader of the local congregation was driven from his home and relocated to another village. Authorities continue to harass and intimidate the villagers.”
- “In March 2011, 21 people belonging to an unrecognized Protestant church in Pha Khau Village, Phinh Giang Commune, Dien Bien Dong district, Dien Bien Province, were threatened with property confiscation and forced relocation unless

they stopped meeting to worship. The individuals refused and authorities continue to harass and intimidate them.”

- “[I]n March 2011, Hmong Protestants leaders who started an unrecognized congregation in Ha Tam village, Muong Ba commune, Tua Chua district, Dien Bien province were detained and interrogated by local authorities. They subsequently were expelled from the district. The ‘new’ converts in Ha Tam village were threatened and ordered to renounce their faith.” (USCIRF Annual Report, 2011.)

The State Department’s Religious Freedom report for 2010 describes another example of forced renunciation: “In the Ho Kaw Village of the Dien Bien Province in 2009, district officials pressured 10 Christian families to recant their faith.” Among them were “[t]hree ethnic Protestant H’mongs, Sung Cua Po, Sung A Sinh, and Hang A Xa, who refused to renounce Christianity [and] were allegedly detained, handcuffed, and beaten by police in order to force them to renounce their faith. Following the beatings, most Christians in the village stopped practicing their religion under pressure from local officials and family members. . . . After additional police threats, Po signed a renunciation of Christianity. In March, Po and his family fled his home after continued abuse from authorities and family members, and have not been seen since that time.” (U.S. State Department IRFR, 2010.)

The persecution of Hmong Protestants goes back a number of years, with many incidents taking place in Dien Bien province in 2006 and 2007, as reported by USCIRF in its 2008 Annual Report:

- “In Dien Bien province, Muong Lay district, Cha Cang commune, local authorities encouraged Hmong clan leaders to pressure local Protestant families to cease practicing their faith, including by forcing some families to construct traditional altars in their homes and/or to sign formal documents renouncing their beliefs.”
- “In Dien Bien province, East Dien Bien district, police broke up a house church meeting, banned worshippers from gathering, confiscated religious material, fined followers, forced some to cut wood, and visited the homes of church members to pressure them to abandon their faith.”
- “Religious leaders in the northwest provinces and central coast region, including leaders and followers from the Inter-Evangelistic Movement Bible Church, also reported that they were being denounced as “enemies of the state” for “believing in an American religion,” and were forced to pay fines.”

- “In January 2007, security officials threatened to freeze the bank account of a Protestant leader in Muong Khong district, Dien Bien province unless he either left the district or renounced his faith.”
- “Members of one house church Protestant group in the northwest provinces report that police actively broke up meetings of worshippers and authorities refused to register their meeting areas. Members of this group reported that they were forced to ‘meet secretly at night, in the fields’ in order to worship and that police actively pressured them to abandon their religion and return to ‘traditional beliefs.’ There are no reports that any security officials have been punished for these actions, despite the fact that they have been technically illegal since the February 2005 decree.”
- “In Muong Nhe district, Dien Bien province, a house church deacon was detained after he returned from Hanoi carrying church documents and applications for registration. Since that time, there are reports that a special task force of security personnel has been living in the district to monitor the activities of Hmong Protestants there.”
- “Police have threatened to charge the village chief of Muong Nhe district, Dien Bien province with national security crimes for sending researchers documents about government attempts to ‘prohibit Christian practice’ in the northwest provinces.”
- “In 2006, Protestants in Muong Lay district, Dien Bien province, were forced by police to construct traditional animistic altars in their homes and sign documents renouncing Protestantism.” (USCIRF Annual Report, 2008.)

B. The May 2011 Gathering in Muong Nhe

In May 2011, a mass gathering occurred in Muong Nhe in response to decades of political repression and religious persecution of Hmong Protestants. Boat People SOS and other human rights organizations have spoken at length with participants of the May 2011 gathering who have since fled Vietnam and are seeking asylum in Thailand. The asylum seekers have discussed in detail what occurred at the gathering, as well as the events that preceded it.

The May 2011 gathering was preceded by several incidents of harsh repression in Dien Bien province in early 2011, as discussed above, which further inflamed simmering discontent by Hmong Protestants. Among these incidents was the demolition of an entire Protestant Hmong village in Muong Nhe District.

In January 2011, authorities in Muong Nhe District sent military troops with orders to raze all the homes and confiscate all the farm land in the Hmong village of Na Khua in Nam Nhu commune

of Muong Nhe. The village is home to over a hundred households, all Protestant, who had been seeking legal recognition of their church since 2006. Authorities had repeatedly put pressure on the villagers to renounce their faith, claiming Protestantism to be an American religion. When villagers refused to recant their religion, on January 28, 2011, government-hired workers, escorted by armed troops, started to demolish the villagers' homes. Over a hundred Hmong households were evicted from their ancestral lands. (BPSOS Congressional Testimony and Report, January 2012.)

Hmong villagers decided to hold a mass prayer gathering to ask for an end to religious persecution and the confiscation of their homes and land. Word got out to Hmong populations living in other provinces, where they too suffered severe forms of religious persecution, forced renunciation of faith, and confiscation of land.

Muong Nhe, where many Hmong Protestants have been forced off their land, was a logical place for Hmong to gather. For decades Muong Nhe has also been the site of numerous incidents of harsh religious persecution against Hmong Protestants, as documented by USCIRF, the U.S. State Department, and respected international NGOs such as Freedom House.

Beginning on or about March 25, 2011, news of the impending gathering in Muong Nhe began to spread in the following provinces: Dien Bien; Lai Chau; Son La; Lao Cai; Yen Bai; Ha Giang; Cao Bang; Dak Lak; Dak Nong; Binh Phuoc; and Lam Dong. "On April 30, 2011, thousands of Hmong began to gather near Huoi Khon Village in Muong Nhe district of Dien Bien." HRW, May 17, 2011. This date and location have been confirmed by Hmong Vietnamese asylum seekers who had attended the gathering.

According to those who attended the gathering, the Hmong Protestants attended the gathering for two main reasons: First, to demand the return of their land that had been confiscated without appropriate compensation by the Vietnamese government; second, to demand the right to practice their religion freely.

Those who attended the gathering state that, on May 2, 2011, government officials came to Muong Nhe and asked the Hmong why they had come there. One of the asylum seekers explained, "We answered because the government officials destroyed our farm land and sold our land to the rich, and have persecuted our Christian ways from 1990 until now." For these reasons, the Hmong had come together to beg government officials to return their land so that they could support their families and to grant the people the ability to practice their religion freely.

On May 2, 2011 police and local government officials arrived at the site of the Hmong gathering. Authorities spoke to individual protestors, asking for the reasons behind their gathering. They took the protestors' identification documents and recorded their names and residence information with the promise that their demands would be taken into consideration. Based on interviews with

the asylum applicants, these records appear to have been used to track and arrest protestors in later months.

On May 3, 2011 the Vietnamese security forces increased their presence in the area. On May 4, 2011, two helicopters arrived at the area where the Hmong gathered, according to the asylum applicants. One of the asylum seekers who had attended the gathering said the voice, which identified itself as Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, said: “I ask/beg for you to return to your homes. We will find farm land for you people so you can eat and drink. I am coming one time only. I will not come again. If you do not go home, don’t . . . say that I didn’t warn you.”

The second helicopter that arrived poured a colored liquid down upon the area where the Hmong gathered. It caused the leaves on the trees to turn a “funny color,” and the water in the well where they drank to look oily, he said. A number of the participants believe that this unknown substance resulted in the deaths of some of the Hmong who were at the gathering. In particular, several of the applicants mentioned that two children and an elderly woman died soon after the liquid was dropped from the helicopter. The applicants said those who died had drunk the infected water or had eaten rice cooked with the infected water. While Vietnamese government officials admitted that at least one child died during the gathering, they blamed lack of food and water and poor sanitary conditions at the encampment. (Radio Free Asia, “Protests in Dien Bien as told by locals,” May 13, 2011 and DPA, “Babies die from poor conditions at protest camp,” May 9, 2011.)

Human Rights Watch reported that “[o]n May 4 and 5, Vietnamese military troops and helicopters moved in to suppress the assembled people.” HRW, Vietnam: Investigate Crackdown on Hmong Unrest, May 17, 2011.) Several of the applicants confirmed that there was a marked increase in the presence of Vietnamese armed forces on May 4 and 5, of several thousand soldiers and police.

1. The Crackdown on May 6

On May 6, 2011, the assembled military and police, armed with truncheons, electric shock batons, pistols, and AK-47 assault rifles, began to use force to disperse the crowd, according to those in attendance. According to Human Rights Watch, “There are unconfirmed reports that dozens of Hmong were killed or injured” by security forces during their attack on the gathering, adding that confirmation of the reports was difficult because “[t]he authorities sealed the area and refused permission to foreign diplomats and journalists to travel there.” (HRW, Vietnam: Investigate Crackdown on Hmong Unrest, May 17, 2011.)

A number of the asylum applicants reported seeing participants in the gathering who were seriously injured, with some possibly killed, during the attack. The applicants reported the following:

- An acquaintance from Dak Lak province was being beaten on the head with a baton. When the man fell to the ground, the applicant believed he was dead. The applicant then fled the gathering site.
- On May 6, 2011 the applicant saw a child about 13 years old stabbed by the police. He also saw a man, approximately 40 years old, hit in the head with a baton.
- A man was beaten and collapsing on the ground. “His wife came and hugged him. The police came and stabbed her in the stomach. I saw that and did not want to stay and watch anymore so I ran.”
- “On the 6th I saw many people being beaten. But it was chaotic. I saw people being beaten and arrested -- both men and women; children as well. I was scared, so I ran.”

Government officials, such as the deputy chair of the provincial People’s Committee, rejected reports by foreign media agencies that local authorities used force to dispel the unrest, or that many Hmong were arrested and even killed: “The chairperson noted that while dispersing the crowd, the Muong Nhe authorities did not use force, but only organized working teams of mass organizations to help the people understand the scheme of these bad elements and to voluntarily return to their residential areas. They also provided medical care and treatment for those who were ill, especially the elderly and children, to ensure security and order there.” (*Quan Doi Nhan Dan* [People’s Army] newspaper, May 29, 2011.)

Spokeswoman Nguyen Phuong Nga from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam also stated that the protestors left Muong Nhe voluntarily. (Radio Free Asia, December 5, 2011.) This is inconsistent with the reports of the applicants in these cases, all of whom indicate that participants were driven from the area by violent means. The government account is also called into question by the reported extent of military and police deployment at the gathering.

2. Government Responses to the May Gathering, including Subsequent Persecution of Participants and Others

The state-controlled media in Vietnam, as well as some foreign wire services and radio stations, have attributed the mass gathering of Hmong to cult-like beliefs spread through a radio program that a Hmong “King” or “savior / messiah” would come to the area on or around May 21, 2011 to unite the Hmong and create their own Hmong Kingdom there. In rationalizing the crackdown on the gathering, the Vietnamese government has focused its propaganda messages on this point, which resonates with its long-held official line that Hmong Protestantism is not a genuine religion, but a guise for anti-government activities used by “hostile forces” to dupe and incite the gullible, ignorant Hmong.

In the government's first public response to the unrest on May 5, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson told the press: "Taking advantage of the situation some bad elements tried to provoke the crowd and mobilize to establish an independent 'kingdom' of the Hmong, disturbing the social order, security and safety of the locality." (Reuters, May 6, 2011.) Three days later, *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* (People's Army) newspaper stated: "These acts of misusing religion to violate the law and destabilize Hmong ethnic communities in Muong Nhe, Dien Bien, should be promptly terminated. The instigators should be exposed and strictly punished under the law." (*Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, May 8, 2011.)

According to the Hmong asylum seekers, however, there was no discussion of seeking independence or autonomy among those who joined the gathering in Muong Nhe. Instead, they say they gathered because of long-standing grievances over government confiscation of their land and persecution of them as Protestants. While it is unclear whether some in the crowd initially gathered in response to a radio program, what is clear is the decades of persecution suffered by those in the crowd and that many joined the crowd in protest of this treatment.

- ***Restrictions on Media Access and Mobility***

Radio Free Asia reported that after the incident the Vietnamese government did not allow journalists or representatives of foreign governments or international organizations to enter the region. The reason stated was poor weather conditions. (AFP, May 6, 2011; Radio Free Asia, May 13, 2011.) Foreign media were finally authorized to visit Muong Nhe on May 26-27. (*Quan Doi Nhan Dan* [People's Army], May 29, 2011.)

According to a number of the applicants in these cases, freedom of mobility for Hmong Protestants in Vietnam was further restricted after the May 2011 gathering. Prior to the gathering, a permit was required only to travel outside the province. After the gathering, Hmong villagers are not allowed to travel outside their own villages without a permit.

- ***Subsequent Arrests and Mistreatment of Hmong***

An unconfirmed number of Hmong who had gathered in Muong Nhe were detained in the months following the gathering. On May 12, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Nguyen Phuong Nga stated the authorities have arrested "a number of extremists" but provided no information about the numbers, identities, or whereabouts of those arrested. ("Vietnam: 'Extremists' detained in Hmong gathering," Associated Press, May 12, 2011.)

The official state media in Vietnam have reported on the detention and arrests of Hmong in conjunction with the unrest, such as the eight who were sentenced to prison in March 2012 (see below.) Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a respected international non-governmental organization based in London, has reported that up to 130 participants may have been arrested and detained at the time of the gathering. (CSW, "Vietnam: eight Hmong sentenced following last year's cult gathering in Dien Bien province," March 16, 2012.)

The asylum applicants state that in the weeks and months after the gathering of Hmong Protestants in May 2011, many Hmong Protestants were detained and/or subjected to physical violence. They recount the following:

- Mr. Giang A Su, a leader of an unregistered church in Lao Cai province, was summoned to the district office in December 2011 for his alleged participation in the gathering. He was detained there for two days. When the police released Mr. Giang A Su they threatened to re-arrest him soon. Mr. Giang A Su did not attend the May 2011 gathering.
- Mr. Vang A Chu and Mr. Ly A Chi from Nam Nhu III village in Dien Bien province were arrested in August 2011.
- Mr. Giang A Vang from Dien Bien was arrested after the gathering. Reports by the government-run news media confirm the arrest and conviction of a Mr. Vang A Giang.
- On December 12, 2011, police in Dak Lak province shot and killed a Hmong man who had participated in the gathering while he was in hiding in the jungle. He was from Cu Pui commune, Krong Bong district in Dak Lak.

Vietnamese police also attempted to arrest a number of those who had participated in the gathering. Those who fled to Thailand often did so after the police came to their homes and the homes of their family members in order to arrest them.

Arrests and detentions have not been limited to those who actually participated in the gathering. Family members of protestors who are in hiding have been detained and abused in search of information on the whereabouts of their relatives. Family members of those who went into hiding were threatened and beaten by the police:

- *Imprisonment*

Vietnamese state media reported that on March 13, 2012, the Dien Bien Provincial People's Court sentenced eight Hmong to terms of up to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment plus two years' house arrest on charges of "disrupting security". State media accounts alleged that the eight, plus two Hmong "ringleaders" who remained at large (Vang A Ia and Thao A Lu), had incited ethnic Hmong to claim a government land grant in order to establish a separate Hmong state. Sentenced to 30 months were Giang A Si and Vang A Giang. Sentenced to two years were Mua A Thang, Thao A Khay, Chang A Do, Thao A Lau, Cu A Bao, and Giang Seo Phu. (BBC Vietnamese Service, March 14, 2012; *Cong An Nhan Dan* (People's Police) newspaper, March 14, 2012, Radio Free Asia, March 14, 2012; AFP, March 14, 2012.)

It should be noted that "Vietnamese courts remain under the firm control of the government and the Vietnam Communist party and lack independence and impartiality. Political and religious

dissidents are often tried without the assistance of legal counsel in proceedings that fail to meet international fair trial standards. Defense lawyers who take on politically sensitive cases are intimidated, harassed, debarred, and imprisoned.” (HRW World Report, 2012: Vietnam.)

II. General Human Rights Violations in Vietnam

Rather than improving its respect for human rights as it seeks a greater presence on the international stage, the Vietnamese government’s human rights record is actually getting worse. Human Rights Watch (HRW) states in its World Report that “[t]he human rights situation in Vietnam deteriorated significantly in 2013, worsening a trend evident for several years.” (HRW World Report, 2014: Vietnam.)

A. Freedom of Expression

Vietnam has seen a rise in the number of bloggers, activists, and other outspoken critics of the government in recent years, and it has responded with brutal suppression of these individuals and greater restrictions on the freedom of expression. In January 2014, “Vietnam had an estimated 150-200 political prisoners... including lowland Vietnamese and ethnic minorities prisoners....” (HRW World Report, 2014: Vietnam.)

The government has also responded to its increased criticism over the Internet with greater restrictions on digital freedom. Decree 72, “...which contains provisions legalizing content-filtering and censorship, and outlawing vaguely defined ‘prohibited acts,’ was signed on September 1, 2013. (HRW, Vietnam Universal Periodic Review [hereinafter UPR] Submission 2013.) Decree 174, signed on November 13, 2013, “impos[es] fines on people who post ‘propaganda against the state’ or ‘reactionary ideology’ on social media channels like Facebook.” (HRW, Vietnam UPR Submission 2013.)

The Vietnamese government also uses a system of surveillance to suppress political and religious dissenters. The U.S. State Department describes in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 the various methods that the Vietnamese government uses to monitor the population. It states, “Authorities continued to open and censor targeted persons’ mail; confiscate packages and letters; and monitor telephone conversations, e-mail, text messages, blogs, and fax transmissions. The government continued cutting the telephone lines and interrupting the cell phone and internet services of a number of political activists and their family members.” The government also uses block wardens and a system of household registration to monitor those whom they suspect of being involved in political or religious dissent. (U.S. State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013, for Vietnam [hereinafter Human Rights Report 2013].)

B. Freedom of Movement and Assembly

Vietnamese law also restricts freedom of movement. All citizens are required to inform the local police when changing their residence or staying overnight at any location outside their own homes. Freedom of assembly is restricted as well, and “authorities require official approval for public gatherings and refuse to grant permission for meetings, marches, or protests they deem politically or otherwise unacceptable.” (HRW World Report, 2014: Vietnam.)

C. Land Rights and Discrimination Issues faced by Hmong Protestants

Lack of secure land tenure as well as unlawful appropriation of land by government officials and their associates has led to loss of farm land and increased poverty among the Hmong in their traditional home provinces in the Northern Highlands. “Although Vietnam has several laws and policies on land and other natural resources, none of these provide legal recognition of ethnic minorities’ customary collective rights to the land, the forest or their resources....” (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Update 2011: Vietnam.)

The UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, who visited Vietnam in July 2011, highlighted the growing problem of landlessness and confiscation of traditional agricultural lands among ethnic minority communities, as well as the authorities’ use of excessive force in dispersing peaceful gatherings over these issues. “Large areas of fertile lands have been turned over to industrial crops, including coffee and rubber, while massive in-migration of ethnic Kinh has put additional pressure on scarce available land. Some ethnic minority sources report alleged ‘land grabs’ and criticize resettlement programmes aimed at turning minority agricultural practices towards sedentary agriculture and removing them to make land available to migrant Kinh. They report that peaceful demonstrations over these issues have been met with excessive force, violence and arrests by the authorities.” (Report of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, Mission to Vietnam, 5-15 July 2010.)

After being driven from their traditional homes and lands without any compensation, and unable to freely practice their religion, some Hmong Protestants have moved to the Central Highlands and other provinces in the south, hoping for less repressive living conditions there.

Unfortunately, many then encounter the same issues there, where local authorities harass ethnic minority Protestants, pressure them to renounce their religion, and confiscate their land. (See HRW, “Montagnard Christians in Vietnam: A Case Study in Religious Repression,” 2011.)

Stereotypes and derogatory views of ethnic minority groups in the media, as well as “views articulated by the Government may negatively influence public perceptions of ethnic minorities and lead to discriminatory treatment.” (Report of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, Mission to Vietnam, 5-15 July 2010.) Discrimination against the Hmong as ethnic minority Protestants is often a factor in local authorities’ decisions to rule against them in land conflicts and refusal to issue them land titles.

Misperceptions and stereotypes about the Hmong are perpetuated by the use of derogatory language by “many officials, researchers and the media” in Vietnam. (Rob Swinkels and Carrie Turk, “Explaining ethnic poverty in Vietnam, a summary of recent trends and current challenges,” World Bank, Vietnam, 2006.) “Minorities are burdened further by perceptions of them as backward, passive, ignorant, and the architects of their own poverty and under-development. Besides constituting unfortunate stereotypes, this perception is used to lend justification to a top-down model of decision-making about minority issues and development models that undervalues genuine consultative processes and traditional knowledge.” (Report of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, Mission to Vietnam, 5-15 July 2010.)

Hmong, particularly those lacking official household registration documents and those belonging to unregistered Protestant house churches, are often blamed in the state media for deforestation, as well as smuggling, drug running, and organizing plots against the government. A 2010 article in *Cong An Nhan Dan* (People’s Police) -- published more than a year before the unrest in Muong Nhe -- reported that Dien Bien’s police force had uncovered “sneaky groups” of Hmong who had disseminated distorted propaganda defaming the party and the government. (*Cong An Nhan Dan*, September 13, 2010.)

D. Torture in Police Custody

Police brutality, including torture and fatal beatings, continues to be reported in all regions of Vietnam. Human Rights Watch reports that “[o]fficial media and other sources continue to report many cases of policy abuse, torture, or even killing of detainees.” (HRW World Report, 2014: Vietnam.) Human Rights Watch also reports that “[p]olice frequently torture suspects to elicit confessions and, in several cases, have responded to public protests over evictions, confiscation of land, and police brutality with excessive use of force.” (HRW World Report, 2012: Vietnam.) The U.S. State Department has cited “[c]redible reports [which] suggested that local police continued to use contract thugs and citizen brigades to harass and beat political activists and others, including religious worshippers, perceived as undesirable or a threat to public security.” (U.S. State Department, Human Rights Report 2013.)

In March 2013, *Morning Star News* and several other media outlets reported that Vam Ngaij Vaj (also known as Hoang Van Ngai), a Hmong church leader, was beaten to death in police custody in Dak Glong District. Vaj and his wife were arrested by police while clearing brush from their field, and initially charged with “illegally destroying the forest.” According to media accounts, police allegedly beat Vaj around his neck and shoulders and likely used electric shock on him, resulting in his death on March 17, 2013. “Hmong Christian Leader in Vietnam Beaten to Death in Police Custody, Sources Say,” *Morning Star News*, March 28, 2013. The *Morning Star News* recounts, “Hmong churches in the Central Highlands often report harassment by a communist regime that views Christianity as a threat, and the spurious charge of “destroying forest” on their own property was consistent with such harassment.”

Many of those who have been killed in detention were arrested for minor infractions such as traffic violations. (HRW World Report, 2012: Vietnam,” and HRW, “Vietnam: Widespread Police Brutality, Deaths in Custody,” September 22, 2010.) However, those who have been arrested and tortured by Vietnamese police or government officials, or at the instigation or with the consent or acquiescence of such officials, also include a number of ethnic minority asylum seekers who returned to Vietnam, including several who were rejected in UNHCR refugee status determination proceedings.

Political and religious detainees, including members of ethnic minority groups, and / or members of unapproved religious groups such as Protestant house churches, are even more likely than ordinary citizens to be tortured in police custody. “Political and religious detainees and others whose cases are considered sensitive are frequently tortured during interrogation, held incommunicado prior to trial, and denied family visits and access to lawyers.” (HRW World Report, 2012: Vietnam.)

This police brutality has been on the rise in recent years: “Since late 2006 we have observed significant increase in the use of violence and torture by the police, both in uniform and plainclothes, which coincided with the government crackdown against political dissidents and nonconformist churches. This crackdown has continued to this day.” (Statement of Nguyen Dinh Thang, PhD, Executive Director, BPSOS at the hearing on “Examining Ongoing Human Rights Abuses in Vietnam,” United States House of Representatives, January 24, 2012.)

Human Rights Watch noted, “People arrested on national security charges because of their religious or political beliefs are even more susceptible to torture, not only because police want to extract information or confessions from them, but because they are routinely held incommunicado, without access to legal representation and sometimes even family members, during their pre-trial detention period, which can last from three months to more than one year.” (HRW, “Montagnard Christians in Vietnam: A Case Study in Religious Repression,” March 30, 2011.)

People arrested for their political and religious beliefs in Vietnam face physical abuse at each stage of their arrest, detention, and imprisonment. BPSOS has spoken directly with many individuals who have fled Vietnam after suffering torture at the hands of the Vietnamese police, and has received details of the extreme abuse they suffered. Some are beaten into submission upon arrest or during transit to the police station so that they cannot shout out or draw attention to their plight from passersby. The beatings usually continue during the first several days in police custody, when most political and religious detainees are held incommunicado and denied any contact with family members or a lawyer. After transfer to a pre-trial detention center for investigation, the torture and physical abuse becomes systematic, meted out during interrogation sessions to extract information and coerced confessions from the prisoner. Former religious and political prisoners describe being beaten with truncheons and leather sandals, boxed on the ears until they bled, slammed against concrete walls, and shocked with electric batons.

Specific forms of torture, cited by Nguyen Dinh Thang in congressional testimony in January 2012, include:

- Lining the victim up against the wall and beating him in the chest, sides and legs.
- Handcuffing the victim to the upper rim of the window, causing him to stand on his toes, while beating him with batons and electric rods.
- Stripping the victim naked and flogging him with a belt.
- Kicking the victim in the chest, thighs, stomach with military boots.
- Punching the victim on the head and temples.
- Locking victim up in solitary confinement in a pitch dark and filthy place.
- Using a small knife to cut into the victim's flesh.
- Hitting the victim's ankles with a wooden stick.
- Standing the victim in water and electro-shocking him.
- Drawing a large amount of blood from the victim.
- Applying electric shocks to the victim's private parts.

Family members of religious and political prisoners in Vietnam have described the condition of their loved ones upon release: many have “gone crazy” and are never able to work again. Some are released early from prison to the hospital or home and die shortly after their release from injuries sustained during prison torture.