

BPSOS Releases Footage of Vietnam's Brutal Repression of Hmong Christians in Muong Nhe, Dien Bien

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Today BPSOS releases never-before-seen footage of the Vietnamese government's brutal crackdown of Hmong Christians who gathered to demand religious freedom and an end to land seizure by the government.

On May 1, thousands of Hmong Christians came together at a peaceful demonstration near Huoi Khon Village, Muong Nhe District, Dien Bien Province in the Northwest Mountainous Region of North Vietnam. The mass demonstration, which caught the local authorities by surprise, was triggered by the demolition of an all-Protestant village, Xa Na Khua, in Muong Nhe earlier in the year. The local authorities had repeatedly put pressure on the villagers to renounce their faith, claiming Protestantism to be an American religion. As pressure did not work, on January 28, 2011, government-hired workers, escorted by armed troops, started to demolish their homes. After a brief interruption during the Lunar New Year celebrations, the workers returned to complete their job. Over a hundred Hmong households were evicted from their ancestral lands.

This incident became the rallying cry for Hmong in other provinces. They too had faced decades of political repression and religious persecution by the Vietnamese government.

The militia quickly arrived. In the following days they were joined by hundreds of military and mobile anti-riot police troops. The government forces encircled the demonstrators and, on May 6, launched a brutal assault. Scores, including men, women, and children, were reportedly killed and over 130 detained. Suspected Hmong activists who successfully fled the scene were hunted down one-by-one by the police.

Some international news sources attributed the mass demonstration to a cult-like belief in two "messiah" figures who promised to lead the Hmong to a pan-Hmong kingdom. According to Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang, Executive Director of BPSOS, this was not the case. He has interviewed scores of Hmong who finally made it to Thailand after months in hiding in the jungle and trekking through Laos.

"The real trigger was the government's seizure of land, forced renunciation of faith, and destruction of an entire all-Protestant village in Muong Nhe," he explained.

He pointed out that Xa Na Khua was among the list of 671 Hmong affiliates of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN) that had attempted to register their religious activities for the past six years but largely to no avail. BPSOS compiled the list in 2006 and the US Department of State brought up the issue with the Vietnamese government. Despite repeated promises by the Vietnamese authorities, there has been no real progress.

After the massacre, the Vietnamese government has sealed off the area and spread inaccurate information to distract world opinion from the real causes.

“Some of the Hmong survivors provided us with raw footage captured on video; for the first time we have evidence of what went terribly wrong in Muong Nhe: a massacre of peaceful Hmong demonstrators who had very legitimate demands,” Dr. Thang said.

Video footage and a synopsis of the incident can be found at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_gleadjG7c&feature=g-upl&context=G2fdc004AUAAAAAAAAAA

http://www.machsongmedia.com/images/stories/bpsos_muong_nhe_incident.pdf