

Catholicism

The Catholic religion is recognised by the Vietnamese government, and the number of Catholics in Vietnam is reportedly increasing, with estimates of between 6 and 8 million. In addition, in recent years Vietnam and the Vatican have made steps towards re-establishing diplomatic relations. However, this is not the whole picture for Catholics in Vietnam. Violations against Catholic communities 2012-2014 included destruction of sacred symbols, gravestones and church property, physical attacks on clergy and lay people attending mass, disruption of religious services, harassment, and discrimination in the distribution of services and utilities.

Like other religious organisations, Catholic churches and organisations are subject to restrictions on the appointment of personnel, the use of educational facilities, interaction with overseas co-religionists, and other activities. Catholics are also at the forefront of the struggle for land rights, not only for Catholic communities whose land and property was confiscated in connection with, or before, the Communist takeover, but also for farmers whose land has been sold to developers in corrupt dealings.

My Yen, September 2013

On 4 September 2013, a large number of Catholics demonstrated peacefully in front of the Peoples' Committee District Office in Nghi Phuong for the release of two men arrested as scapegoats for a gathering of Catholics at the home of the District Police Officer the previous May. Armed soldiers and hired thugs beat the demonstrators and smashed religious icons in the area. Following the incident, the government launched a media campaign which blamed the Catholic petitioners for all of the unrest, portraying them as an "unruly mob" engaged in a violent attack on the government.

Con Dau, May 2010

In May 2007, Da Nang People's Committee announced its plan to turn part of the Catholic parish of Con Dau into an eco-tourism centre. The residents would be moved, and the church would remain as a tourist attraction. The parishioners strongly resisted this plan. Although neighbouring villages were also affected, the Con Dau residents feel they were singled out for 'harsh treatment' because of their religious identity. On 1 May 2010, when parishioners gathered in the cemetery for a funeral, there were severely beaten by police armed with batons and electric prods. Several residents were detained, including one pregnant woman who suffered a miscarriage as a result of serious injuries inflicted by beating and torture. Over a hundred people were injured and 62 were arrested.

Con Cuong, November 2011 and June 2012

Between November 2011 and June 2012, the authorities mobilised hundreds of individuals to disrupt masses held in Con Duong. On 1 July 2012, several hundred public security agents, militia and police attacked the priest, Father Nguyen Dinh Thuc, and parishioners. Two individuals from Thanh Chuong district, Nghe An province who threw rocks at the chapel said that they were paid 500,000 Vietnamese dong by the local authority to commit these acts.

Catholics and social action

Vietnamese Catholics who are inspired by their faith to engage in social welfare activities have been charged with crimes against the state. The Redemptorist community in particular has been extremely active in the struggle against corruption and social injustice, using social media to raise awareness of these issues domestically and internationally. As a result of their outspoken advocacy, several Redemptorist bloggers have been arrested and imprisoned.

Catholic priest Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly has been a prominent human rights defender since the 1970s, campaigning for freedom of religion or belief, democracy and free media reporting. Since 2007 he has been serving an eight-year sentence for 'disseminating slanderous and libellous information harmful to the state'. In September 2010 the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called for Father Ly's immediate and unconditional release.

In 2011, 17 Catholics involved in faith-based social welfare activities from the diocese of Vinh and Thanh Hoa were charged under Article 79 for 'conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam'. Fellow Catholics believe they were 'abducted' because they travelled to the Philippines and Thailand to participate in democracy workshops. The leader, Dang Xuan Dieu, was sentenced to 13 years.

Catholic-led interfaith movements have been at the forefront of calling for a Constitution which values citizen rights and human rights, and have been vocal in opposing the ill-treatment of political prisoners and restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief.

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