

Hoa Hao Buddhism

Founded in 1939 by Huynh Phu So (known as “Prophet” or “Teacher” to his followers) Hoa Hao Buddhism was named after the birthplace of the founder, a village in Tan Chau district, Chau Doc Province, in South Vietnam. In 1965, there were more than 2 million followers officially registered as Hoa Hao Buddhists. Currently, there are approximately 3 to 6 million Hoa Hao Buddhists, mainly concentrated in An Giang, Dong Thap, Kien Giang, Vinh Long and Phong Dinh Provinces.

His teachings mesh well with the cultural norms and economic conditions of the people (mostly farmers) living in the Mekong Delta region and represent the essence of Buddhism. Hoa Hao Buddhism has no clergy or statues and few temples. Hoa Hao Buddhists are thus encouraged to lead a normal agricultural life with their families while observing Buddhist teachings.

Right after the takeover of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the communist government ordered the dissolution of the entire Hoa Hao Buddhist Church (HHBC) hierarchy. They confiscated all HBC properties including offices, Hoa Hao central library, temples and shrines, the Hoa Hao University in An Giang province, and all recital minarets. In all, before 1975, the HHBC had: 28 provincial or city offices, 82 district offices, 476 village offices, 3,100 hamlet offices, and over 800 recital minarets. With few exceptions all of these facilities were confiscated by the communist government – a sample of such facilities is included in Attachment 1. This policy that continues to this day has severely disrupted the traditional way of life of Hoa Hao Buddhists at both the individual and the community levels and hindered them from practicing their beliefs.

Lap Vo, Dong Thap, February 2014

On Feb 9, 2014 Mr. Nguyen Bac Truyen was brutally assaulted and arrested at his house in Lap Vo District, Dong Thap Province. His wife, Mrs Bui thi Kim Phuong, was arrested and released in the evening. Public security personnel vandalized their house and damaged purposely the Hoa Hao religious altar and furniture. Truyen received order from the local authorities to move out of Lap Vo.

Hung Nhon, Dong Thap, February 2014

On Feb 11, 15 Hoa Hao Buddhists together with 6 rights defenders were on their way to visit Mr. Nguyen Bac Truyen and his wife when they were intercepted by hundreds of policemen and thugs in Hung Nhon Hamlet. They were arrested. After three days, 18 were released; 3 remained in prison.

Ha Noi, February 2014

On Feb 24, on their way to the Australian Embassy to report these incidents, Mr Nguyen Bac Truyen and his wife were intercepted, assaulted and injured by the Vietnamese undercover police. Mr David Skowronski, Australian Second Secretary in charge of Politics, had to come to their rescue and take them to the hospital.

Cho Moi, An Giang, February 2014

On Feb 25, Hoa Hao Buddhists gathered at the home of Nguyen Van Vinh (Long Giang Village, Cho Moi Hamlet, An Giang) to commemorate the day their religion’s founder disappeared. Some 300 to 400 police agents, servicemen, militia, and thugs raided Mr

Vinh's house and attacked the participants. Mr Le Tan Tai, one of the participants, were again assaulted by four men as he was on his way home.

Cho Moi, An Giang, May 2014

On May 18, Hoa Hao Buddhists gathered at the home of Mr Nguyen Van Vinh to commemorate the founding of the Hoa Hao Buddhist religion. The government sent its people in to brutally crackdown on the ceremony participants. Mrs Vo Thi Gam (82 years old), being pulled and pushed, fell down and broke her arm. Mrs Tran Thi Xinh (80 years old) was pulled so hard that her clothes fell off and she became naked. The government forces took away all cameras, camcorders, mobile phones, laptops and banners found on site.

References:

Violations of the right to freedom of religion of Hoa Hao Buddhists in Dong Thap, Feb 2014

Religious freedom violations against Hoa Hao Buddhists, Mar 2014

Suppression of Hoa Hao Buddhism (07-16-14)

Hoa Hao Buddhism -- A religion rooted in the peasantry, Nov 2014