

Protestant, Mennonite

There are several Mennonite groups in Vietnam, some of which have registered with the government under the Vietnam Mennonite Church, while others have not. Unregistered Mennonite congregations have been subject to various violations against their right to freedom of religion or belief, and their leaders have been detained in connection with their religious activities and their advocacy on social justice issues.

Certain Mennonite congregations are well-known for their advocacy on behalf of the poor, especially in areas such as housing rights. Some families belonging to these churches have had their homes burnt down by unknown assailants, and church leaders have received sentences as long as eight years in connection with proselytising and teaching.

Mennonite congregations in Quang Ngai and the Central Highlands report various forms of pressure on them to recant, including threats of violence from “thugs” hired by local security forces, and the disruption of religious services.

Binh Duong Province attacks, June 2014

On the night of 9 June 2014, 300-500 public security officers, police, and uniformed persons broke down the door of a Mennonite prayer house in My Phuoc, Binh Duong Province, searched the premises, beat and threatened 76 people. Those present were attending a gathering which the church had informed the local authorities of beforehand, as required.

The public security officers forced their way into the compound by cutting through locks. Once they had entered, the church’s pastor asked them why they had brought such a large group and why they had forced their way in. However, the leaders continued to search the building, dragging people from their bedrooms, including several children as young as 10 years old. Some church members present claim that the security officers and others in the group, some of whom were armed with batons, beat men, women and children as they pulled them outside.

Female students who were detained that night report being beaten in a room with the lights turned off when they began to sing hymns to comfort one another. Male students were also beaten and some were forced to remove their shirts before detention. The church centre’s water and electricity supply were cut off shortly after. This affected not only those at the church, but also others sharing the same block.

After 9 June, the church sought legal representation in order to file a complaint. However, when they met on 12 June to arrange the details, public security officers detained the pastors as they tried to leave the meeting. Some had their personal belongings confiscated. That night, unidentified persons used sticks, planks, stones and bricks to smash the front of the centre’s prayer house. Over 60 people were inside at the time. Witnesses say members of the militia were among the attackers.

From 13 to 16 June, attackers threw stones and rotten eggs at the buildings and at those entering and leaving the centre. They also received phone calls from people threatening to blow up the centre and attack those inside with knives if they did not move out. Dozens of Mennonites from this group were called to “working sessions” (interrogations) in the days that followed.

The centre and its members are still closely monitored by the security forces, and some leaders are followed by agents. They still receive threatening phone calls.

References

Report No. 1 of Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, Binh Duong Province, June 20, 2014

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Police attack Mennonite Church in Vietnam (article)

CSW interviews, 2013 (not available)