

Duong Van Minh Religion

The Duong Van Minh religion is a variant sect of the Christian religion adopted by some Hmong ethnics. After 25 years of persecution the number of apparent followers of the Duong Van Minh religion has shrunk from some hundred thousand at the religion's highest point to around ten thousand today, living mostly in four Northeastern provinces of Vietnam: Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Tuyen Quang and Thai Nguyen. Since the religion is not recognized as a "faith" the Vietnamese government openly orders its "eradication". Nowadays repressive measures under administrative pretexts are used to destroy the organizational structure of the Duong Van Minh religion, harass its active leaders, discriminate and intimidate its followers.

Due to grave and systematic persecution, Hmong followers cannot practice freely. One of their religious ceremonies is the specific funeral ceremony. Five symbolic wooden objects used for this ceremony were stored in small sheds of about 7 square meters so villagers could share them. By end of December 2013, the government had destroyed all of the 24 sheds for storing funeral objects of the Duong Van Minh believers in four Northeastern provinces which were built in May 2013. During the raids police and security agents used truncheons and electric batons and savagely beat believers unconscious. In some instances the use of chemical weapons to disperse protest gatherings has caused serious injuries. Generally injured victims were denied medical treatment which caused long lasting health damages such as semi paralysis and inability to work.

The government arrested at least 10 ethnic Hmong Duong Van Minh who are fluent in Vietnamese and have served as interlocutors on behalf of the believers in complaining to the government agencies. They were later sentenced to up to two years in prison on the charge of "abusing the democratic freedoms" under Article 258 of Vietnam's Criminal Code. Fearing arrest, a dozen other Hmong went into hiding in the mountains and forests. At least two victims have been underground since 2001.

In October 2013 about 150 Hmong went to Hanoi to demand the right to practice freely their Duong Van Minh religion. Various government offices kept passing the buck to one another, without anyone giving a reply to the requests. Worse, public security agents dispersed the demonstrations and took petitioners back to their home provinces. During the raids several persons were beaten unconscious but were denied emergency aid. At least three injured young ladies were later hospitalized up to 14 days in their home provinces. Since she was beaten brutally during the raid in mid October 2013, another young lady of 18 years old, Ms Hoang Thi Anh, is severely handicapped and faints every ten minutes.

Vietnam's intensive and systematic suppression of the Duong Van Minh religion began in 1989 and has gone on for 25 years, originating from the government's narrow and indefensible definition of religions and beliefs. This definition is contrary to provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), namely Article 18 on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 22 (on Article 18). This definition, which was criticized by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Faith at his press conference in Hanoi in July 2014, should not be the basis for deciding which religious organizations may operate in Vietnam. The government's pressuring on Duong Van Minh believers to give up their religion or any other suppressive acts aiming to pressure them to renounce their faith constitute a violation of an inalienable human right, the right to have or adopt one's religious belief

as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of ICCPR Article 18, which cannot be restricted or denied in any circumstance even in state of emergency.

References

Documentation “The 25-year persecution of the Hmong's Duong Van Minh Religion”, VETO! Human Rights Defenders Network, Germany, July 2014

Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Hanoi, July 31, 2014

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