

Report on Vietnam Government Violating Religious Freedom of Mennonite Church in Binh Duong Province, Vietnam

To: UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights
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CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

The Mennonite Church of Vietnam started operating in early 1957 after the evangelist couple James Arlene Stauffer came to Saigon under the sponsorship of the Mennonite Council of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, United States. From then on, the Church expanded throughout Southern Vietnam.

After 1975, the Communist government of Vietnam has been suppressing the Church's religious activities as it implements the Communists' policy of denying religious freedom and controlling all religious organizations. In 2005, the Mennonite Church split into two branches, one led by Pastor Nguyen Quang Trung and another under Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang.

On February 5, 2009, the government's Religious Affairs Committee issued Decision No. 12/2009/QĐ-TGCP recognizing Pastor Nguyen Quang Trung's Mennonite Church. However, the government has continued to forbid Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang's Mennonite Church from operating and has actively suppressed it through sophisticated tactics such as damaging facilities used for worship, illegally arresting believers, and other forms of harassment. The Church's leaders have repeatedly attempted a dialog with the local government, to no avail. Below is our report on the incident of religious suppression involving church members attending a training retreat at the Mennonite Training Center in My Phuoc 1, Ben Cat District, Binh Duong Province.

(1) General Information:

- Does the incident involve an individual or a group? A group
- If it involves a religious or belief group please state the number of people involved and the denomination of the group: 50 students of the Mennonite Theological Training Center in Binh Duong Province, Vietnam
- Country(ies) in which the incident took place: My Phuoc I commune, Ben Cat District, Binh Duong Province, Vietnam
- Nationality(ies) of the victim(s): All Vietnamese citizens, several are ethnic minority H'Mong, Montagnards... living in Vietnam
- Does domestic law require (re-)registration of religious associations and if yes, what is the current status of the group in question?

Point C, Provision 1, Article 16, Chapter III of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief No. 21/2004/PL-UBTVQH11 dated June 18, 2004 of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly specifies that only organizations that "have registered their religious operations and have conducted stable religious operations" may "be recognized as religious organizations. "

Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang of Mennonite Church filed application for registration with the government several times, but it was always denied.

(2) Identity of the Persons Concerned

- Family name: _____
 - First name: _____
 - Denomination of his/her religion or belief: Evangelical Church of Christ of Vietnam
 - Place of residence or origin: _____ Village, _____ Commune, Sa Thay District, Kontum Province, Vietnam
 - Birth date: _____
 - Gender: _____
 - Nationality(ies): Vietnamese
 - Authorization granted to person who represents subject: Self and the group.
- *Please refer to Appendix I, section 1 below for additional Individuals with personal Information

(3) Information Regarding the Alleged Violation

- Date and time: June 9, 2014 – June 12, 2014; October 10, 2014; and November 1 – November 2, 2014
- Place: Mennonite Theological Training Center in My Phuoc 1 commune, Ben Cat District, Binh Duong Province.
- Please provide a detailed description of the circumstances of the incident in which the alleged violation occurred respectively the nature of the governmental action:

❖ **Ben Cat District Government in Binh Duong Province, June 9, 2014 – June 12, 2014, harassment of Mennonite Theological Training Center in Binh Duong.**

The Mennonite Theological Training Center in My Phuoc 1 invited 50 pastors and religious trainees to attend a religious training session from June 10 through June 13, 2014. The Center had registered 50 participants for temporary residency with public security of My Thoi Hamlet, My Phuoc 1 Commune, Ben Cat District; and the public security Lieutenant Colonel in charge had authorized the 50 participants to stay for 3 days at the training center. On June 9, 2014, approximately 25 trainees arrived at the training center.

At about 11 p.m. on June 9, 2014 a group of public security agents and militia came to the center, knocked loudly on the gate as they demanded to examine the trainees' temporary residency permits and temporary absence permits (from their permanent homes). Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, the director of the training center, protested the group's demand because the My Thoi Hamlet public security office had already approved the temporary residency of the trainees. Disregarding Pastor Quang's objection, the government forces tore down the gate. Then a force of about 500 people including public security agents in uniform and in plain clothes, military personnel and some news reporters working for the state media entered the premise of the center. (See Appendix III, section 1, video a).

Right away, the public security force beat Pastor Quang, breaking two of his teeth. Then, they climbed upstairs to the second floor entering the rooms where the pastors were sleeping, waking them up, and making them stand up while forbidding them from putting on their clothes. They scolded the pastors and slapped them on their faces, also videotaping them without shirts (see Appendix II, section 1, picture a)

At that time, the public security force had not yet come to our room. We the female trainees could observe how the government forces were insulting and beating the pastors.

Afterwards, the intruders entered the room where five of us were staying. We voiced our concern regarding the way they treated the pastors by beating them and not allowing them to dress. We started singing hymns in praise of the Lord. Immediately they punched us on our bodies and slapped us on our faces. Then public security agents forced us to go downstairs to the first floor where the pastors were sitting. About 20 to 25 intruders (some in uniforms, others in plain clothes) surrounded each of the female students as they led us to the My Thoi Hamlet's public security station. A total of 55 people including 17 female trainees were arrested and taken to the station for questioning.

In the incident, besides Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang who was severely attacked by the public security force, three others, including Pastor Tran Minh Hoa, female students Vang Thi Thiet and Ho Thi Do, were brutally beaten by them; their faces were bruised and swollen.

At the public security station, they locked all 17 female students in a room. At about 1 a.m. on June 10, 2014, public security agents cut off power to our room, and let 12 strangers come into the room. They locked the door, and started slapping us on our faces violently and striking us with strong blows. The reason for such a treatment is that we dared to sing hymns praising the Lord.

All the pastors were locked in one room, and the male students in another room; reportedly none of them were beaten at the public security station.

At about 2:30 am on June 10, 2014 they interrogated the female students, prepared a report, and then released us (female students) at about 2:30 a.m. When we came back to the Center, only Pastor Quang was there. Other detainees had not been released.

At about 3:20 am on June 10, 2014 after the pastors had been interrogated; they were released. At 4:00 am on the same day the male students were released after being interrogated.

In the afternoon of June 10, 2014 the public security agents forced the pastors out of the Center and asked them to return to their local churches. The reason cited was that they did not have the permit of residency at the Center, even though Pastor Quang had registered for their temporary residency at the public security station previously.

At night time on June 12, 2014, again a force of 50 people, including public security agents in uniform and in plain clothes and thugs, came by motor bikes to the front of the Center. There, they threw bricks and rocks into the Center causing breakage to glass windows and other damages to the Center.

On June 14 through 18, 2014: The training course went on despite the disturbance. Public security agents and thugs continued to cause more turmoil to the Center. This time they threw rotten eggs to the classrooms disrupting religious studies; and the stench made all trainers and trainees very uncomfortable to conduct any activity.

On October 10, 2014, at 11 a.m., on the day of graduation of the previous religious training class, the Mennonite Training Center held a ceremony for those who had completed the class previously.

Before we completed the ceremony, over 30 public security agents and 17 thugs knocked on the door, demanding access to check our papers. We did not let them in because the ceremony was still ongoing. The agents insisted in demanding that Pastor Quang let them in to check temporary residency permits, temporary permits for absence from hometowns, and identity cards. (See Appendix II, section 2, pictures a and e). Immediately they came in to destroy the lock, banged on the door and had strong arguments with Pastor Quang. Their real objective was to disrupt the graduation ceremony, not to check papers. (See Appendix II, section 2, picture b; and Appendix III, section 2, Video a and b). In the end, they forced Pastor Quang to list the names of all pastors and students currently staying in the Center. (See Appendix II, section 2, picture c). This time they only destroyed the furniture of the Center, but did not physically assault anybody. (See Appendix II, section 2, pictures d and f).

This was not the first time the public security entered the Center when classes were being held. The local government often delayed granting approval to the Center Director's request for temporary residency permits on behalf of trainees who came from other towns or provinces. Using the lack of permits as their excuse, agents had entered the Center, checked papers, and even confiscated identification papers without returning them to some of the victims.

The goal of the local authority is to oppress freedom of religion and suppress religious practices of members of the Mennonite Church in Binh Duong. The government does not want anyone to receive religious training at the Center and therefore has continued its harassment to sow fear in the hearts of trainees who have to face the certainty of assault.

On November 1 – November 2, 2014:

About 6 pm on November 01, 2014, more than 150 public security agents in uniform and in plain clothes, and thugs attacked our Theological Training Center again, when we were conducting a prayer service to God.

They threw bricks and rocks at the Center; they blocked all the entrances to the Center and locked the Center's main gate. The thugs were very aggressive in attacking the Center, and uniformed public security agents turned blind eyes to the thuggish attack. We recognized the thugs and plainclothes public security agents because they had come to attack our school so many times before.

About 2 pm on November 2, 2014, public security agents in uniform and in plain clothes, and thugs attacked the Training Center again. This time 25 students of the Center were praying. Under the command of a public security officer in plainclothes, face covered with a facemask, more than 100 public security agents and thugs threw bricks and rocks, and fired gravels with slingshots at the Center. They caused glass windows and main doors to shatter. Some students also suffered minor injuries from thrown rocks. (See Appendix II, Section II, section 3, pictures a and b); (Also see Appendix III, section 3, Videos a and b)

After throwing bricks and rocks at the Center, more than 100 public security agents and thugs bursted into the chapel through the gate; they slapped pastors and students who were at the chapel at that time. Three of the victims ended up with swollen faces and one with nose bleeding. These victims did not want to have identities known; thus, we did not show their names and ages in the report.

After the attack, public security forces and thugs retreated to outside of the Center and continued to throw bricks and rocks at the Center. Frightened, more than 10 students fled to the rubber plantation located behind the school.

In the mean time the Director of the Center, Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, used loudspeakers to ask public security agents and thugs to stop throwing bricks and rocks at the Center; but they ignored the words of the pastor. On the following day, Pastor Tran Minh Hoa telephoned Public Security Office of My Thoi Hamlet, Ben Cat District several times to report the incident and asked them to investigate the case, but the responding public security agent did not respond and hung up the phone.

This report includes only true facts in the hope that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief will intervene to help our religious trainees at the Mennonite Theological Training Center in Binh Duong Province so that in the future trainees could study in peace without disruption and attacks. We thank all the officials, particularly the UN Special Rapporteur, for reading this report and hopefully for your rapid intervention.

- List and explain the reasons for believing that the victims have been targeted for their religion or beliefs: The only reason for the continuing arrests and other forms of harassment carried out by the local subdistrict's public security office is the government's decision to prevent the Mennonite Church from conducting religious training.
- The perpetrators of the incidents occurring at the Mennonite Theological Training Center are the government public security agents and hired thugs. The agents normally hid their name tags and badges. The agents allowed the thugs to freely attack the victims and cause damages to the Training Center. They have committed violent acts against Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang and trainees several times.
- The witnesses of the above incidents include more than 100 people; there are 10 witnesses presented in this report, they also are the victims of these incidents (please see their personal information in Appendix I, section1). Particularly, in the incident of November 2, 2014, one more person shown below is willing to be a witness of the case.
- - **Name: Hoang Van Hoa**
 - Religion: Catholic
 - Place of residence: Road D10, My Phuoc I Industrial Zone, Thoi Hoa Commune, Ben Cat District, Binh Duong Province.
 - Phone Number: +84168.222.0307
 - Age: 42
 - Gender: Male
 - Nationality: Vietnam
 - Authorization granted to person who represents subject, if any.

(4) Measures Taken by Victims, their Families or Other Persons

- Have the victims, their relatives, or anyone else submitted reports to government officials or cognizant agencies (public security, religious affairs committees, people's committees, etc.). The pastor who manages the Center has filed complaints many times with the district and provincial governments but they have continued to ignore those complaints.

- Any other measures?

Public security has continued to harass the Center and requested the managing pastor, Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, to meet with agents for interrogation many times.

- List any response by the government: Only continued harassment so far.

- Based on your understanding, has the government conducted a genuine investigation; if yes, how did they investigate? Describe the progress of any investigation and other measures taken by the government.

The government has not investigated with the objective to stop illegal harassment, but has continued to blacklist, intimidate and use violence against Church members.

(5) Information Pertaining to the Individual Who Prepared This Report

- Family Name: _____

- Given Name: _____

- Contact Information:

Address: _____ Village, _____ Commune, Sa Thay District, Kontum Province, Vietnam

Telephone: _____; Email: _____; Skype: _____

- The entity making this report is an individual.

- The identity and other details that could reveal the identity of the reporting individual must be kept confidential.

This report was prepared and signed by _____.

APPENDIX I, Section 1: Additional Information about Individuals in the Group

a.

- Family name: _____

- Given name: _____

- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam

- Address: _____

- Birth date: _____

- Gender: Female

- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

b.

- Family name: _____

- Given name: _____

- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam

- Address: _____

- Birth date: _____

- Gender: Female

- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

c.

- Family name: _____
- Given name: _____
- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam
- Address: _____
- Birth date: _____
- Gender: Female
- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

d.

- Family name: _____
- Given name: _____
- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam
- Address: _____
- Birth date: _____
- Gender: Female
- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

e.

- Family name: _____
- Given name: _____
- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam
- Address: _____
- Birth date: _____
- Gender: Female
- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

f.

- Family name: _____
- Given name: _____
- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam
- Address: _____
- Birth date: _____
- Gender: Female
- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

g.

- Family name: _____
- Given name: _____
- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam
- Address: _____
- Birth date: _____
- Gender: Female
- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

h.

- Family name: _____
- Given name: _____

- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam
- Address: _____
- Birth date: _____
- Gender: Female
- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____
- i.
- Family name: _____
- Given name: _____
- Religion: Evangelical Church in Christ of Vietnam
- Address: _____
- Birth date: _____
- Gender: Female
- Authorization granted to person who represents subject: _____

Addendum: photographs documenting the government's attack and harassment



Nếu không có lệnh của công an, còn đồ có dám ném gạch đá và cầm gậy hành hung giữa khu dân cư như thế này trong nhiều giờ không?

Thugs throwing stones at the Mennonite Training Center in plain view of local residents



Có lẽ do ném đá mệt quá nên chuyển qua môn hai là dùng nạng thun bắn vào nhà nguyện.

Resorting to using elastic-powered slingshots after becoming tired from throwing stones?



During the night raid on the Mennonite Training Center, public security agents forced victims to get out of bed without allowing them to put on their clothes.



Victims of beating with bruised faces.



Militia members and public security agents outside the Center



Government personnel filming and taking pictures during the night raid on the Center



Government forces broke down the Center's main gate.



The Center's main gate before government forces tore it down.



Religious class's graduation ceremony before being disrupted by public security