

### **CAODAISM: ESTABLISHMENT AND GOVERNMENT TAKEOVER**

Third Amnesty of God or Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ, also known as Caodaism or Cao Dai Religion, is an endogenous religion founded in South Vietnam in 1926. Caodaism calls for unity, love, justice, peace, freedom, democracy and respects for all faiths. Our faith also requires that we follow and obey our religion's code or rules, but the Vietnamese Communist Party has forced Caodaist disciples to follow its policies and to abandon our Religious Constitution established by God, including our laws, traditional rituals and our organizing bodies and institutions.

Prior to the fall of the Republic of Vietnam in April 1975, all religious activities of Caodaism were managed by three Councils: Popular Council, Sacerdotal Council and Superior Council. They had the power to make or modify religious laws/rules, and the combined power of the three Councils was equal to God's power. All laws/rules must be ratified by the three Councils, who then submit them to the Supreme Being for final approval. All positions of Caodaist dignitaries must be approved by God and Divine Spirits through spiritist séances.

In 1979, the Communist regime disbanded the Sacerdotal Council of the Caodai Tayninh Holy See; dissolved all Cao Dai Religious Administrations from the central to local levels; and established the Governance Council (Hoi Dong Chuong Quan), an entity under the government's control. Forty of the forty-six religious properties belonging to the Tayninh Holy See were confiscated. Some of the properties were demolished, some were misused, and some were left vacant. The government then established the Cao Dai Governance Council and appointed Communist Party members to run some of the properties. The new Governance Council modified Cao Dai canonical laws and traditional rituals, and took control of all religious activities.

### **DIFFICULTIES FACED TODAY: INCIDENTS FROM 2015**

#### **Cao Dai Tayninh Holy See, Tay Ninh – May 2015**

More than 900 members of Cao Dai Popular Council signed a petition to the government to have the meeting on May 27, 2015 for Cao Dai members to elect their own leaders and religious heads at the Cao Dai Main Temple in Tay Ninh. However, when the members gathered for the meeting, police officers and authorities stopped members from going to the temple, blocked the temple gates, disbanded groups of people, attacked some members, and arrested others. The Meeting was not held because of so many interruptions and obstacles put in place by the government.

#### **Cu Chi, Ho Chi Minh City – June 2015**

Cao Dai Popular Council members gathered to discuss the articles written by a Vietnamese government-issued magazine that deeply mischaracterized their May 2015 meeting and branded the group as rebels. The site of this meeting was at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Vo in Củ Chi County, HCMC. The People's Committee of Cu Chi County (PCC) arrived at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Vo to disband the meeting. At 16:45 the same day PCC delivered Notice 508, or "Notice on not allowed illegal propaganda", at the residence of Mr. Vo and he was forced to cancel the meeting.

#### **Trang Bang, Tay Ninh – July 2015**

Cao Dai members gathered at the home of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Kim Thoi in Trang Bang district, Tay Ninh province to attend the rite of installing the Divine Eye portrait at her home's altar. The Commune police officer in uniform and others in plainclothes came to the site to direct an assault, which involved smashing furniture and demolishing the Divine Portrait.

#### **Hoa Thanh, Tay Ninh – November 2015**

Cao Dai members gathered at the house of Mrs. Phạm Kim Anh in Hòa Thành district, Tây Ninh province, Việt Nam for the ceremony marking the final period of mourning for an adherent. The Cao Dai members created by

the government came with the commune police to the site using handheld speakers asking Cao Dai worshippers present onsite to leave the ceremony area. They overturned tables of food, destroyed the site and the ceremony decoration, furniture, and damaged part of the house. They also forced the homeowner to follow them to commune office. The owner was detained for several hours and finally let go after a lot of our members came to the commune office to pressure the authorities.

#### **Go Dau, Tay Ninh – November 2015**

Cao Dai members gathered at the household of Mrs. Cao Thi Chinh, in Go Dau district, Tay Ninh province to attend the rite of installing the Divine Eye portrait at her home's altar. The government-organized Cao Dai Branch 1997 and thugs came inside the house to interrupt the ceremony, destroyed the tables and decorations, confiscated their phones and cameras, threatened members not to continue the rituals.

### **ONGOING PERSECUTION**

Cao Dai members who do not obey the government-controlled Cao Dai Branch 1997 are persecuted as follows:

- Loss of freedom of movement: Cao Dai practitioners, including Tran Quoc Tien, Vo Van Quang, Tran Ngoc Suong, Nguyen Xuan Mai, Nguyen Van Thiet, and Luong Thi No, are banned from leaving Vietnam.
- Arrest Warrants: At least one Cai Dai follower, Duong Xuan Luong, has not been able to stay in one place for his safety, since an arrest warrant was issued in 2008.
- Harassment: Cao Dai followers receive multiple "invitations to work" with the commune police officers (arbitrary dentation), and are monitored by the police daily on what they do, where they go, and who they meet.

### **PLAN OF ACTIONS AND REQUEST FOR SUPPORT**

The independent Cao Dai wish to retain our independence and to be able to practice our religion in a way we see fit. To do so, we aim to hold a Popular Meeting to elect our leaders and to reform our organization. In order to achieve this ultimate goal, we request to have freedom to travel, form groups, gather, and hold meetings. We also request to have freedom of speech, freedom of information, and the right to retain and practice our unique culture and traditions. These are rights stated in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and further enshrined in the many legally binding treaty bodies to which Vietnam is a party. Freedom of religion includes these other rights and Vietnamese government must not only allow us to exercise these rights but promote and protect them.

In pursuit of our goal, we are seeking support from independent religious communities and civil society organizations inside Vietnam to pressure Vietnam to uphold its binding human rights obligations and for endorsements regarding our Popular Meeting petition to elect our own leaders.

We are also seeking to build support internationally, especially from the Southeast Asia region (ASEAN). We ask civil society around the world to endorse and support our plan of action, and to raise their voice of concern to the Vietnamese government on our behalf so that we can have freedom of religion in the near future.

Thank you for your time and support, we highly appreciate it.

Sincerely,

The Popular Council of Cao Dai Religion in Vietnam - Taiwan, February 18, 2016