

**Joint Statement in Support of
the Vietnam Freedom of Religion or Belief Roundtable and
the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Vietnam**

April 15, 2016

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, would like to applaud and express our support for the formation of the Vietnam Freedom of Religion or Belief Roundtable last month. A direct result of the Asia Pacific Religious Freedom Forum organized by China Aid and held in Taiwan on February 18-21, 2016, the Vietnam FoRB Roundtable has also drawn inspiration from the Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Southeast Asia held on September 30 and October 1, 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand; this conference was co-organized by BPSOS, ICJ, and Forum-Asia.

According to its mission statement, Vietnam FoRB Roundtable is “a forum for diverse sectors in society to come together to discuss and promote freedom of religion or belief” according to two core values: compassion and justice. It follows the model of similar roundtables in the United States and Europe.

The formation of this roundtable is a significant development that would promote freedom of religion or belief in Vietnam, not in isolation but as part of the broader regional and global movements. Through this roundtable, unrecognized religious communities in Vietnam may collaborate on advocacy, provide mutual support, engage government authorities, communicate with foreign diplomatic missions, and interact with similar roundtables already operating or being formed in other countries.

We call on the U.S. government to fully support the Vietnam FoRB Roundtable, including inviting the Roundtable to use the premises of U.S. mission and consular posts in for in-person meetings -- due to safety concerns, Roundtable meetings have so far been conducted online. We urge President Barack Obama to meet with the Vietnam FoRB Roundtable during his upcoming state visit to Vietnam.

We call on international human rights organizations to maintain vigilance over the safety of Roundtable participants, introduce them to relevant regional and international forums, and ask foreign delegations visiting Vietnam to meet with them or even participate in Roundtable meetings.

The Vietnamese government should welcome the Vietnam FoRB Roundtable, considering it a forum to engage and dialogue with unregistered religious communities. Reporting on his July 2014 mission to Vietnam, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief encouraged the government “to broaden and solidify the very limited and unsafe space for the free unfolding of religious diversity in Vietnam.” He went on to observe

that “the situation of independent religious or belief communities should be seen as a test question indicative of the general societal tolerance.”

As organizations and individuals who promote greater freedom of religion or belief worldwide, we stand in solidarity with the Vietnam FoRB Roundtable and all its participants.

ORGANIZATIONS:

21st Century Wilberforce Initiative

Advisory Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights

Boat People SOS

Campaign to Abolish Torture in Vietnam

Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

China Aid

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Coalition for a Free and Democratic Vietnam

Coalition to Abolish Modern Day Slavery in Asia

Con Dau Parishioners Association

Counterparts

Freedom House

Hmong American Partnership

Human Rights Lawyers Network Without Frontiers (Atlanta)

Human Rights Without Frontiers International (Brussels)

International Christian Concern

International Institute for Religious Freedom

International Office of Champa

Jubilee Campaign USA

Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation

The Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice

Montagnard Human Rights Organization

National Vietnam & Gulf War Veterans Coalition

People Serving People Foundation

Popular Council of Cao Dai Religion in Vietnam – Overseas Representative Office

PROHAM - Society for the Promotion of Human Rights, Malaysia

Vietnamese Women for Human Rights

Women for Human Rights in Vietnam

INDIVIDUALS:

Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria, PROHAM

Eva Kusuma Sundari, Member, Indonesian House of Representatives; Vice Chair, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights

Dr. Grant A. McClure, Commanding Officer, Counterparts

Greg Mitchell, President, The Mitchell Firm

Helen Ngo, Co-founder of Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam

John J. Molloy, OSJ, Chairman, National Vietnam & Gulf War Veterans Coalition

The Honorable Joseph Cao, Former Member of U.S. House of Representatives

Joshua Wong, Convenor and Founder, Scholarism (Hong Kong)

Kody Kness, Vice President, China Aid

Amb. (retired) Mark P. Lagon, President, Freedom House

CH (COL) Ron Crews, USAR Retired; Endorser, Grace Churches International; Executive Director, Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty

Rong Nay, Executive Director, Montagnard Human Rights Organization

Russell Moore, President, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Scott Morgan, President, Red Eagle Enterprises

Shanu Srivastava, President, American Mortgage Relief

Rev. Tam Pham, Director, Committee on Justice and Peace, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

William C. Walsh, Human Rights Attorney, Bisceglie and Walsh