

Vietnamese Government Persecutes Thien An Catholic Monastery in 2017

Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations at Geneva
8-14 avenue de la Paix
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Fax: (+41) 22 917 90 06
E-mail: freedomofreligion@ohchr.org or urgent-action@ohchr.org

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Does the incident involve an individual or a group?**

A religious group – Thien An Monastery

- **If it involves a religious or belief group please state the number of people involved and the denomination of the group:**

This is St. Benedict's Order Catholic monastery community of 96 priests and monks located in Thien An, City of Hue.

- **Country(ies) in which the incident took place:**

Vietnam

- **Nationality(ies) of the victim(s):**

Vietnamese

- **Does domestic law require (re-)registration of religious associations and if yes, what is the current status of the group in question?**

Vietnamese government requires registration of religious associations and Thien An Monastery is considered being registered under the umbrella of the Archdiocese of Hue, Vietnam Catholic Church.

2. IDENTITY OF THE PERSONS CONCERNED

Note: if more than one person is concerned, please attach relevant information on each person separately.

- **Family name:** NGUYEN VAN
- **First name:** DUC
- **Denomination of his/her religion or belief:** *Catholic*
- **Place of residence or origin:** *Cu Chanh Hamlet, Thuy Bang Ward, Huong Thuy Commune, Thua Thien-Hue Province.*
- **Age:** *45*
- **Sex:** *Male*
- **Nationality(ies):** *Vietnamese*

3. INFORMATION REGARDING THE ALLEGED VIOLATION

- **Date and time (approximate, if exact date is not known):**

June 28, 2017 - June 29, 2017

- **Place (location and country/countries):**

Cu Chanh Hamlet, Thuy Bang Ward, Huong Thuy Commune, Thua Thien-Hue Province



Figure 1: Thien An Monastery in Hue, Vietnam (RFA photo) Radio Free Asian

- **Please provide a detailed description of the circumstances of the incident in which the alleged violation occurred respectively the nature of the governmental action:**

In 1998, Thua Thien Hue government confiscated 49 hectares of land belonged to Thien An monastery which was established since 1940. They had been trying to take another lot of 107 hectares since 2015. During this time, they destroyed the Cross built within the monastery campus several times. However, the Cross was re-built by the monastery.

This time, the government continued to destroy the Cross, and used violence at heightened and dangerous level.

At 8:00 AM on June 28, 2017, the government of Thua Thien province assigned about 200 public securities and plainclothes security agents pretending as thugs entered inside the Thien An Monastery arming with dangerous weapons like knives, metal batons, police's gears, brutally attacked the monks. Specially, plainclothes security agents also ordered public securities and thugs to destroy and deliberately break the Cross.

- **Which indications exist that the victim(s) has been targeted because of his/her religion or belief?**

Thua Thien government's plot to destroy Thien An Monastery and the Cross have been carefully planned and coordinated with the police, public security agents, and thugs. The Monastery had been attacked three times in recent years:

- *In May 17, 2015, plainclothes security agents and thugs stole, broke into pieces and threw the Cross into the near-by creek.*
- *After the Cross was reestablished by the monks, it was destroyed again on March 8, 2016, by the public securities, thugs, and local government officers from Thuy Bang commune. More seriously, one of the public securities stepped on Jesus statue of the Cross with the support and assistance of the Thua Thien province officers.*
- *The Cross was reestablished again by the Monastery on June 26, 2017, and was bent down, blown off by the public securities and thugs using weapons, such as sledge hammers, steel saws, crows, hoe blades, and tri-thong rods.*



Figure 2: A government officer step on the face of Jesus (Citizen photo)

Although being isolated, provoked, and beaten by the attackers, the monks calmly received the blows and tried to protect the Cross by saying prayers and embracing it. The attackers aggressively corralled hair, strangled, pushed, punched into the heads, and kicked into the faces, chests, and abdomens of the monks. Many monks got injured. The attackers acted right in front of the officers of the local government of Thuy Bang commune, the town of Huong Thuy and Thua Thien-Hue province. Even an officer from Tien Phong forestry company, Nguyen Viet Chinh, who regularly guarded the monastery, used the tri-thongs rod continuously hit Reverend Vo Van Giao, on his head causing severe bleeding and being unconscious. Attempt to bring Vo Van Giao to the hospital for treatment was stopped at the monastery gate by the mobile police. Besides, a group of women were accompanied by public security agents into the monastery to verbally abuse the monks with obscene languages. During the attack, mobile police set up check point at the monastery gate to stop and harass anyone who wanted to come in or out the Monastery. They also confiscated the monastery's motorcycles.

While attacking the monastery, the government also brought trucks, bulldozers, and workers to another part of the monastery's property to destroy the pine forest and dig the ground to build a road on the property with the purpose of separating the monastery from the area and confiscate the whole 107 acres of the monastery.



Figure 3: Beating of the monk by the thugs (Photo by Thien An Monastery)

The incidents have been recorded and widely reported by the medias: Voice of America, Radio of Free Asia, Truyen Thong Chua Cuu The TV, etc. Here are some links:

- o http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/cross-of-thien-an-monastery-broken-and-missionaries-beaten-ha-06282017090323.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=thien+an

This is a short video clip with English explanation for your reference:

[Thien An Monastery](#)

<https://youtu.be/cJAdrrfmLxQ>

- **Identification of the alleged perpetrator(s), name(s) if known and/or function, suspected motive:**

The local governments, including Huong Thuy commune, Thuy Bang ward and Cu Chanh village, led by the Thua Thien Hue province government have long had a grand plan to confiscate all 107 acres property of the monastery.

Thien An Monastery was established on the current property since 1935 and the ownership deed was given in 1940. The monks have built it into a unique, beautiful, and famous farming place with orange garden and pine forest that best suit with their devout lives of contemplative, praying, and laboring.

On January 19, 1976, the Thanh Mau School, a property of the monastery, was forced to hand over to the Department of Agriculture and Forestry for crop breeding. The property later became the Tien Phong Forestry Company. In 1998, the local government confiscated 49 acres of Thien An monastery property to create a tourist theme park with Thuy Tien lake and some entertainment attractions then became abandoned and let ruin.

For the past few years, the local government allowed some foreign investment companies and accompanied them to inspect the Thien An monastery property with the intention to develop the area. At the same time, the government ordered the monastery not to replant the pine trees or build any road in the forest. They also set up guarding nearby to monitor all monastery activities. The government did not want the monastery to further enhance the property so they can confiscate all to sell to the developer.

- Are the perpetrator(s) known to the victim?

Yes. Some of the government officials and public security agents were recognized by the victims because these victims were invited to hold ‘working sessions’ with the local government and the meetings occurred with the attendance of the victims and the local government.

- Are state agents or non-state-actors believed to be responsible for the alleged violation?

Yes. Both state agents and non-state-actors (thugs hired by the government) were responsible for the alleged violation.

- If the perpetrators are believed to be State-agents, please specify (police, military, agents of security services, unit to which they belong, rank and functions, etc.), and indicate why they are believed to be responsible; be as precise as possible.

There around 200 people involved in the attack of the monastery, some are recognized because they are the ones who met with the monks during meetings at the government offices. Hundreds are plainclothes security agents. These are the state-agents that are recognized:

- 1. **Nguyen Tai Tue** – Head of Thua Thien – Hue Provincial Religious Committee (a government organized agency to oversee the religious affairs in the province)*
- 2. **Tran Hong Lam** – Lieutenant Colonel, Deputy of Religious Security Bureau of Thua Thien – Hue Province*
- 3. **Vo Thanh Ky** – Colonel, Head of Huong Thuy Commune Public Security*
- 4. **Tran Cong Quy** – Thua Thien – Hue Province Public Security Officer*
- 5. **Le Van Thin** – Chairman of Thuy Bang Commune’s People Committee*

6. *Nguyen Thanh Nguyen* – Vice Chairman of Thuy Bang Commune’s People Committee
7. *Vo Trong Nhon* – Captain, Head of Thuy Bang Commune Public Security
8. *Duong Van Hieu* – Lieutenant, Deputy Head of Thuy Bang Commune Public Security
9. *Nguyen Duc Muoi* – Secretary of Thuy Bang Commune

- **If identification as State agents is not possible, do you believe that Government authorities or persons linked to them, are responsible for the incident, why?**

There were many thugs who were hired by the government and the security force. Those thugs were armed with weapons and aggressively attacked the monks while government officers and security agents verbally led and encouraged them to remove the Cross.



Figure 4: Thugs on the attack of the Monastery (Photo by Thien An Monastery)

- **If there are witnesses to the incident, indicate their names, age, relationship and contact address. If they wish to remain anonymous, indicate if they are relatives, by-passers, etc.; if there is evidence, please specify.**

During the attack on the monastery on June 28 and 29, 2017, there were at least 40 monks at the place. Many tried to protect the Cross. Some parishioners from the nearby parish came to support the monastery and witnessed the attack. Here are some witnesses:

1. Name: Monastic Reverend Antoine Nguyen Van Duc

Age: 45

Relationship: Thien An Monastery Superior

Contact address: Cu Chanh Village, Thuy Bang Commune, Huong Thuy Town, Thua Thien-Hue Province

2. *Name: Monastic Reverend Peter Khoa Cao Duc Loi*
Age: 50
Relationship: Thien An Monastery Spokeman
Contact address: Cu Chanh Village, Thuy Bang Commune, Huong Thuy Town, Thua Thien-Hue Province

3. *Name: Monastic Reverend Antoine Vo Van Giao*
Age: 42
Relationship: Thien An Monastic Reverend who was injured and being unconscious in the attack
Contact address: Cu Chanh Village, Thuy Bang Commune, Huong Thuy Town, Thua Thien-Hue Province

4. STEPS TAKEN BY THE VICTIM, HIS/HER FAMILY OR ANYONE ELSE ON HIS/HER BEHALF?

- Please indicate if complaints have been filed, when, by whom, and before which State authorities or competent bodies (i.e. police, prosecutor, court):

1. *On June 29th, 2017, Thien An Monastery released a Press Release to the media to inform of the incident to the Vatican, the Bishop Councils, the worldwide Catholic community asking for help from the international community to raise their voices to stop the violence, illegal grabbing of church property and ruin the Christian's holy symbol (Attachment #1)*
2. *After the second attack, a Denunciation was filed by Thien An Monastic Superior Rev., Nguyen Van Duc, on June 24, 2017, about the intrusion of the monastery property and insulting the Cross – the holy icon of the Catholics. It was sent to the Thua Thien – Hue Provincial People Committee, Archdiocese of Hue, European Union Foreign Affairs Office, and the US Embassy in Vietnam*

- Were any other steps taken?

On November 25th, 2015, a Letter of Response was sent by Thien An Monastic Superior Rev., Nguyen Van Duc, to the Tien Phong Forestry Company to define the ownership right of the monastery in the 107 acres of land that was legally and fully owned since 1940 and to request this company to stop illegal development activities and return the land and the Thanh Mau School to the legal owner of the Monastery (Attachment # 2)

- Steps taken by the authorities:

1. *On June 29th, 2017, the local government and police made a report of the incident in which the attackers were invited to join making the content of the report but not the Monastery. The Monastery refused to sign the report as it did not reflect what really happened in the incident.*
2. *Thua Thien – Hue Provincial government invited the Monastery to a meeting on July 12, 2017, to discuss about the dispute. The meeting yielded no results as the government insisted that they will not resolve the Monastery's land petition for the 49 acres of land that have been revoked.*

<https://www.voanews.com/a/vietnam-plans-talks-catholic-officials-monastery-dispute/3938053.html>

http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/no-result-at-the-talk-of-thien-an-and-vietnamese-authorities-ha-07122017142034.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=thien+an

- Indicate whether or not, to your knowledge, there have been investigations by the State authorities; if so, what kind of investigations? Please indicate progress and status of these investigations as well as which other measures have been taken? No
- In case of complaints by the victim or its family, how have those authorities or other competent bodies dealt with them? What has been the outcome of those proceedings?

In the response letter to Thien An Monastery on July 25th, 2017, the government of Thua Thien-Hue province denied all the allegation about the attack of the monks and the Marian shrine (Attachment # 3)

5. IDENTITY OF THE PERSON OR INSTITUTION SUBMITTING THIS FORM

- Family name: Tran
- First name: Tony
- Contact number or address (please indicate country and area code): 1-919-637-0699

Address: P.O. Box 1074, Morrisville NC 27560

Fax:

Telephone: 1-919-737-0699

Email: condau@yahoo.com

- Status: Individual, group, non-governmental organization, religious or belief group, inter-governmental agency, Government. Please specify: Individual
- Do you act with knowledge and on behalf of the victim(s)? Yes
- Please state whether you want your identity to be kept confidential: Yes

Date you are submitting this form:

Signature of the author

 November 15, 2017

