

**STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN VIETNAM:  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S SITUATION**

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The Vietnamese government claims that our people enjoys religious freedom. When discussing religious freedom, officials frequently display pictures of recently built churches and scenes showing large numbers of believers attending Masses to convince others that there is religious freedom in Vietnam. Nothing is further from the truth.

**A. "FREEDOM" AS DEFINED BY THE GOVERNMENT**

**1. Free to Worship? No. Forced to Renounce One's Faith? Yes.**

Everyone knows that once a person declares his faith, the government will restrict his fundamental rights and apply ingenious methods of discrimination. All believers feel the government's pressure to varying degrees. Government employees who are known to be believers could be fired or at least be shunned and passed over when it comes to awards and promotions. If the person who becomes a believer is someone with stature, the government will use its entire political apparatus, consisting of many organizations and groups, to put pressure on the person and his family. In remote villages in the highlands and near the country's border, the government uses force to prevent people from practicing their religion or to make them renounce their faith. In Northwestern Vietnam, the government even uses border guards for this purpose.

At the same time, in cities from Ha Noi to Quang Ngai to Saigon, from 2008 on, when Catholics apply for identity cards or household registration, the police would issue such documents with the word "NONE" next to the "Religion" item, even after the applicant had declared that he was Catholic on the application form. Whatever its motive, the police is clearly pressuring people to renounce their faith, at least on official documents. In practice, when these people engage in activities aimed at preserving justice and truth, the police would claim that they are not Catholics in view of their official documents. Moreover, these people would encounter many difficulties when applying for admission to schools or for employment, selling property, or dealing with a government agency. The government employees would try to make the process very difficult for such applicants. We witnessed a number of such tragic cases involving people who were trying to sell their houses in Ha Noi. Therefore, if someone applies for an ID card or household registration, he should check the documents issued by the government very carefully and immediately request any needed corrections. Otherwise such persons would become victims of the government's tactic of using the administrative process as a tool of religious oppression.

**2. Free to go to church, to assemble, or pray? No!**

On the books, Vietnam's law recognizes freedom of religion. However, the government continues to violate this freedom in many locations throughout the country.

In Saigon, in the sprawling Phu My Hung region, when nuns and private citizens asked for priests to come and celebrate Mass, the government put up all kinds of obstacles. After a long struggle by the applicants on behalf of their right to religious freedom, the government finally allowed the nuns to invite some priests to come and celebrate Mass, but only in the early morning hours when hardly any believer could attend!

In Hanoi, when people went to the Dong Chiem Church to pray and engage in charitable work, the police blocked their way and used violence, causing dozens to be injured. When Catholics from other parishes come to Thai Ha Church on religious occasions, the government usually tries to stop them or harass them through tactics such as shooting at the tires on their vehicles, confiscating driver licenses, preventing vehicles from entering the town, prohibiting vehicles from other towns to use highways

and streets that lead to Thai Ha Church. They even tried to prevent a bishop from celebrating Mass in Thai Ha, e.g., Bishop P.X Nguyễn Văn Sang when he led a group of priests and believers who traveled from Thai Binh Diocese to Thai Ha Parish on their annual pilgrimage.

It is even worse in the mountainous and border areas. For example, in many locations under the jurisdiction of the Redemptorists in Gialai, priests and even the bishop could not come to celebrate Mass. In Lai Châu, Sơn La and Điện Biên, the local government does not acknowledge any religious establishment and consequently has not allowed any church to be built or priests from other locations to come and celebrate Mass over the past several decades. Only recently the government started to allow a few priests to celebrate Mass in a “semi-official” way at a few spots along Highway 6. Still, in many hamlets in the three provinces, local authorities continue to harass Catholics who gather in someone’s home for prayers. Such harassment includes fines, arrests and beatings. I, myself, had to celebrate mass in hiding during the night usually in the basement of private homes. Several times I had been hunted down by the police and the faithful had to lead me to the woods and steep hills to avoid police's pursuit.

### **3. Free to build places of worship? No!**

Vietnam’s law allows Catholics to remodel, repair or build churches, monasteries and other church facilities. It is quite a challenge to implement any of this in practice because government officials at all levels will try hard to prevent such activities.

**First:** With respect to existing facilities, the government uses delaying tactics when the Church submits applications for repairing or remodeling, or for building on Church land. Government officials usually come up with reasons to deny parishes or religious orders’ requests for construction permits that would meet their needs. For example, Fr. Pham Minh Trieu, pastor of Bao Long parish in Nam Dinh, has tried for 15 years in vain to apply for a permit to renovate the parish church. The local government would do anything to hinder the repair or building project of the church as proposed by the parishioners. Fr. Trieu also reported that as the parishioners were digging pond and building the monument of Our Lady in the front yard of their church, police and soldiers were sent out to harass and prevent them from doing so.

**Second:** In the remote regions or in the highlands, construction of church is strictly prohibited by the government; the government always tries to block the construction of new churches and prevent believers from engaging in religious activities in spite of the large number of Catholics living there. In Sơn La, Lai Châu and Điện Biên, with a combined area of 45,000 km<sup>2</sup>, not a single church has been built to serve the large number of resident Catholics. The government has not provided land or allowed the Church to accept land donated by private citizens for this purpose.

**Third:** In new new urban developments and new commercial zones of existing towns, the government has not allowed the construction of new churches to meet the needs of the faithful. For example, there is no church building in the Phú Mỹ Hưng area in the southern part of Saigon, a so-called “modern” development. Moreover, when the government implemented modernization plans, they demolished existing churches and forced the faithful to relocate. In Saigon, the government tore down the church and the lepers’ asylum in Thanh Binh, and uprooted all the Thu Thiem parishioners when it carried out the modern development of Thu Thiem District. The government is also applying pressure with the aim of tearing down the church and monastery of the Holy Cross Order as part of their plan for commercial development. The government did the same to Du Loc Parish and Dong Yen Parish in Kỳ Anh, Hà Tĩnh Province when it established the Vũng Áng commercial district.

**Fourth:** With respect to religious orders, the government forbids the building of new convents and monasteries in areas served by the orders. When members of an order first come to a new area, they must make do with facilities borrowed from the local parish or purchased as the property of one of the members. The fact that these facilities are legally private property and not church property,

contributes to the risk of them being confiscated or being ordered to vacate as the government attempts to put a halt to such religious activities.

**Fifth:** The government has torn down church properties -- or modified or changed their use -- that it had "borrowed", "leased", or forcibly taken from the Church in an illegal manner. Its objective is to obliterate the religious character of the properties and transform them into private properties. Right in Hanoi, the government still occupies the Đa Minh Church, one of the most beautiful churches in Hanoi (at the Hùng Vương-Chùa Một Cột intersection). In the past, the government used it as a restaurant. In 2011 the government is tearing down the Carmelite and Saint Paul de Chartres monasteries, church properties that had been used by the government in their original form until recently. Also in Hanoi, the government took land from the Fatima Order (Ham Long Parish) in order to build a public school, seized the church and has been using it as an administrative facility, while letting non-Catholic families live in the building in an attempt to erase the religious character of the property. Such official tactics can be seen in many towns and cities.

## **B. INSTANCES OF LACK OF FREEDOM AND UNEQUAL TREATMENT**

The government has treated Catholics and the Catholic Church in the harshest manner. This mistreatment and discrimination can be categorized as follows:

### **1. Church property is not protected under the law**

Beginning in 1954 in the North when the Communist Party took power in Northern Vietnam and in 1975 in the South when it took over South Vietnam, it has not recognized the people's right to own land – a reactionary legal approach that goes against the flow of modern democracy and serves as the basis for the government to confiscate properties (actually for the benefit of high-level officials). However, the government has acknowledged the “land use” rights of individuals and organizations through the issuance of certificates, popularly known as "Red Certificates", authorizing such uses or certifying their ownership of real estate built on the land.

There is one exception: the government does not issue Red Certificates to religious organizations, resulting in virtually no parish or religious order in Vietnam having documents that prove their ownership of properties. When asked about this, government officials usually give the standard response: “because the government has not had time to develop policy” or “the government has not yet studied the matter and extended the practice to religious organizations”. In itself, this response revealed the government's discriminatory treatment of religious organizations. The misery does not end there. Without papers proving their rights to use land and ownership of buildings, parishes and religious orders have a terrible time in their transactions with utilities companies and in handling affairs related to their properties. In addition, they have to live with an ever-present risk, arbitrary confiscation by the government. If the victim protested, the government would ask for proof of ownership. When the victim presented papers issued by the previous government, government officials would say: "Documents issued by the old regime are not valid". The regime refuses to issue ownership documents, but asks for such documents while refusing to accept documents issued under the previous political system when it wants to rob the Church. If a religious organization reacted strongly and the international community showed concern, as in the matter of the apostolic delegation's property in Thái Hà, the government would try to brush over the issue by labeling it "a dispute related to land ownership", not a religious freedom issue.

The Communist government had other tricks up its sleeves. Five years ago, soon after it issued the decree on religious matters in 2005, in 2006 it requested that religious organizations apply for property ownership documents. However, after the parishes and religious orders listed all their properties, including those already confiscated, the government stopped in its tracks and continued its policy of not issuing Red Certificates to religious organizations. Any organization that wants to proceed must accept the loss of their illegally seized properties. For this reason, church property is still like the appetizing morsel dangling from a string in front of a cat -- the insatiable Communist

Party whose hatred for religion is well known. Can there be religious freedom when the law does not acknowledge the Church's ownership of its properties, when religious organizations are never sure about being able to use of their own land and facilities that they have been using for over a century? The regime's tactic has been nothing less than a covert and devious effort to neutralize and oppress religion.

## **2. The Church is not free to carry out her traditional religious activities.**

In Vietnam, the Church is not at all free to engage in traditional activities, i.e., religious events must be approved by the government. Retreats, conferences involving local, national or international religious groups must have official approval, unless one wants to run the risk of harassment and reprisals, including petty revenge. The Church has no freedom in establishing dioceses, parishes, religious orders, and convents and monasteries. The government requires seminaries to let government employees teach Vietnamese history, actually the history of Vietnam's Communist Party, for propaganda purposes and to influence the thinking of future clergy members. The government controls the seminaries' admission process, the ordination of new priests, the re-assignment of priests, etc. The Church must REQUEST authorization and may only carry on once the government has given its APPROVAL. From 2005 on, the government has replaced the word "REQUEST" with the word "REGISTER", but the system is still the "REQUEST – APPROVAL" system that is now more cleverly disguised. If the government does not "APPROVE" and a church organization or a clergyman still goes ahead, the government will call the activity illegal, try to block it, and retaliate later. In 2010 the government prevented two Redemptorist seminarians from being ordained, using tactics such as asking the appropriate bishops to desist from ordaining these two.

Vietnam's government even inteferes with the appointment of bishops, an activity that is clearly under the Vatican's purview. The government accepts only the Vatican's choice of bishops if the individuals have been approved by the government, nominally by the office of the prime minister. In practice, the approval comes from the People's Committee, the Bureau of Religious Affairs, and the police, from the central government to the provincial and city level. Should the central government approve and the provincial or city government disagree, the process would grind to a halt. When a Vatican-proposed candidate is not approved by the government, the appointment of a new bishop can take years. Some dioceses went up to 12 years without a bishop, e.g., Hung Hóia from 1991 to 2003. In practice, the government interferes grossly in Church affairs and is carrying out a strategy aimed at oppressing the Church in a sophisticated and devious way. How can the Church maintain its independence and authority? How can the Church appoint the type of bishops that suits her needs when the government has a say in each step? Therefore I believe that the Church and Vietnam's government have been dealing with each another on playing field that is anything but level, a dysfunctional situation that has diminished the Church's legitimate autonomy.

## **3. Catholics do not have equal rights, including political rights.**

In the past, the Communist Party did not enroll members who are Catholics. Only those who renounced their faith and Christian nature were accepted into the party, after declaring that they were atheists. However, from 2000 on, the party started to recruit Catholics in an attempt to use these new Communists in its assault on the Church. Communists who happen to be Catholic are practically denied the chance to play any leadership role within the government. They are not promoted to mid-level and senior positions. Even in areas where the proportion of Catholics among the local population is very high, e.g., Thái Bình, Nam Định, Đồng Nai, etc., no Catholic has been promoted beyond the position of chairman of the village administrative committee. At the present time, we have not seen any Catholic holding the position of chairman at the district, province and city level. Currently there is not a single Catholic among the ministers of departments and the officer corps of the armed forces. In every governmental unit, including scientific organizations, Catholics have not been promoted to responsible positions even if they are ethically and technically qualified.

#### **4. The Church is not treated like other organizations with respect to financial and commercial activities**

The government allows domestic and foreign entities to lease land and buy properties for building manufacturing and commercial facilities, going as far as letting Chinese and Taiwanese lease land and build their commercial and industrial centers in Vietnam. Ironically, the same government does not allow the Church to lease or buy land, or use her properties for income-producing activities. Worse, the government is illegally occupying land and commercial facilities that once belonged to the Church, and forbids Church organizations from opening bank accounts. This discriminatory measure considerably hampers the receiving of monetary aids for religious or social projects from benefactors.

The government often hinders the operation of companies and stores owned by Catholics. Worse, when a Catholic community happens to be in a location with high financial potential and increased land value, the government would draft "development plans" with the intent to force the residents to leave their homes or destroy their businesses. Examples include the confiscation of land belonging to Cồn Dầu parishioners in the Đà Nẵng Diocese; the demolition of Chợ Sặt in the town of Biên Hòa, within the Xuân Lộc Diocese – an important business center of the Church; the demolition of the residential section of the parish and facilities of the Holy Cross Order in Thủ Thiêm -- a residential area, a church and an ancient monastery in Saigon that happened to be located on a highly desirable piece of land.

#### **5. Socially, there is no equality for Catholics**

The government considers Catholics second class citizens everywhere. Laborers, government employees, and students at all levels are the subject of monitoring and oppression. The government uses subtle and sometimes grossly obvious means to discriminate. For example, T, a college student from Thái Hà Parish who had been active in religious activities, has been watched closely by the police. At graduation time, the police pressured his college to deny him his diploma.

Moreover, the government does not accept Church organizations as legal entities. The government and many entities still do not recognise the seals and signatures of Church officials representing dioceses, parishes and religious orders. Consequently, the clergy's activities are constrained. For example, I cannot use libraries because their management does not recognize letters of introduction issued by the Father Superior of my order. The People's Committee with jurisdiction over my monastery refuses to issue a letter of introduction to me, claiming that I am not under their purview. When I try to do business at a bank, a school, or the post office, the same constraints apply. Once, a sister who maintained the website of the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam wired 400,000 Vietnamese dollars (about 30 U.S. dollars) from Saigon to Hanoi as a payment for my articles, the post office asked for a government paper proving that I was a legal resident in Thái Hà Church. The government has not issued me such a document because I was not allowed to register as a resident of Thái Hà Church – such registration requires the official certification of the legal entity responsible for my residency, which for me is the Redemptorist Order; however, my Order is not recognized as a legal entity. One can conclude that in the current Communist-ruled Vietnam, religious organizations, believers, and especially members of the Catholic clergy are being isolated and marginalized.

#### **6. There is no freedom and no equal treatment with regard to education, communication, and charitable activities**

Clergy members, except the few individuals who toe the Communist Party's line, may not teach in colleges. Catholics may not enroll at military, police and security academies (and some other institutions). The Church and affiliated organizations may not run schools from the primary level through university level, or vocational schools. While the government allows us to run pre-school and kindergarten establishments, local officials frequently try to cause us difficulties. Schools and hospitals that used to be owned and run by the Church had been confiscated by the government and have been operated as public institutions for some time. Now, the government plans to privatize

them, causing them to fall into the possession of government officials or their relatives, without the prospect of the Church being able to get them back and serve society through those institutions.

The Church may not own publishing companies, periodicals, radio stations and TV stations, nor can she pay for space on newspapers or time on radio and TV to make announcements or report on major religious events. The government-owned media even censor obituaries of deceased priests and demand changes in content and wording. Christians typically face roadblocks whenever they try to rent facilities for important religious events. For example, Protestants rented Mỹ Đình Stadium to celebrate Christmas of 2010. Right before Christmas Day, the police pressured the stadium management to negate the contract. On Christmas Day, the police harassed and beat up people who came to celebrate.

The government allows the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam to issue only a single monthly newsletter, “Hiệp Thông”, 100 copies, each not exceeding 100 pages of size A5. I made calculations using the font type of the publication (Times New Roman, Size 14) and found that if each of the 7 million Vietnamese Catholics got an equal share of this publication, in any given year each person would get 5 letters of the alphabet. Catholic websites with foreign domains such as chuacuuthe.com of the Redemptorist Order, have been blocked by firewalls set up by Vietnam's government and subjected to hackling around 10 times in the past few years. When a parish wants to issue a bulletin within its church, the government also interferes through harassment, threats, and even prohibition when the news does not please the government, no matter how accurate.

The government does not allow the Church to open charitable facilities serving handicapped people, orphans, lepers, etc. The Church used to own and run these types of facilities, but the government has confiscated them. The government also attempts to prevent the Church from organizing relief efforts in response to natural and man-made disasters. For example, Thái Hà Church had to give up on the plan to establish a charity center in Thạch Bích, Hanoi, because government officials wanted to skim 10% off the funds needed for the project. At the same time, priests and religious brothers/sisters could not continue with many of their relief efforts on behalf of the very poor who live in mountainous areas because local officials demanded that donated material be turned over to them so that they could distribute it themselves. If the officials had laid their hands on the supplies, very little or nothing would have filtered through to the intended recipients. When facing the crisis of a declining educational system, health care system, morality and culture in Vietnam, the government's actions show that it prefers to let citizens go hungry, suffer from diseases, and remain uneducated and poor, rather than acceding to the religious organizations' request for a chance to participate in serving the people and building society.

## **7. There is no freedom in selecting where one lives and no freedom to travel**

The government turned a blind eye when Chinese citizens came to Vietnam to live and work, and, in some cases, cause trouble for Vietnamese residents. However, when the Catholic clergy and faithful who are dedicated to serving their communities want to travel to the places where they can serve, the government places restrictions on where they may move to, while restricting their freedom to travel. Any clergy member who needs to work in a different location must "register", i.e., get the government's approval. However, the government tries to restrict this type of travel in various ways. When the government fails to issue its approval of someone's application for residency (in Vietnam one must get government approval before one moves to another area), the person's daily life becomes much more complicated. In the Thai Ha monastery, there are approximately 15 resident priests and brothers, all without the government's approval for residency registration, i.e., long-term residency. The church encounters difficulties in transactions involving the post office, utilities, telephone service, and processes involving the local government on account of the residency status of the 15 individuals. The system of residency approval is a violation of the freedom to select where one wants to live, particularly in the case of priests and brothers and sisters.

The government violates citizens' right to travel freely. For example, the police constantly monitors and even trails Thái Hà clergymen. The police has set up a camera aiming at the entrance to the

church so that they can monitor everything and everyone who comes and goes, all the time. Frequently the government violates the clergy's right to travel in a most obvious and illegal manner. For example, the Ninh Binh police refused to issue me a passport in 1999 without giving a valid reason other than labeling me a "reactionary." When the police in Ho Chi Minh City issued me a passport, the Ninh Binh police requested the HCM City police to retract its decision and prohibit me from going abroad. Even when one has a passport, there is no guarantee that one's trip would be allowed. For example, in June 2010 the Hanoi police and HCM City police suddenly prohibited Rev. Nguyễn Văn Phụng from traveling to Rome. In December 2010 the HCM City police prevented the Regional Superior of the Redemptorists, Rev. Phạm Trung Thành, from traveling to the USA. On July 10, 2011, the HCM City police continued to prevent Rev. Phạm Trung Thành from traveling to Singapore for the annual conference of Regional Superiors in Southeast Asia, and on July 12 the Tây Ninh police prevented Rev. Đinh Hữu Thoại, a Redemptorist, from traveling to Cambodia. All these police actions are illegal because the applicants have no police arrest record, have never been in prison, and have not been charged with any crime.

### **C. IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION**

1. In 2004 Vietnam's government issued the Ordinance on Belief and Religion; in 2005 it issued a new decree on religious affairs; in 2007, it issued a White Paper on religious freedom. The regime felt that such actions sufficiently proved that it respects religious freedom and is concerned about meeting the people's spiritual needs. The truth is that it sought merely to use impressive words in a propaganda campaign to cover up its increasing control of religion while trying to placate domestic and foreign critics.

The government and its agents would point to those documents when asked whether there is religious freedom in Vietnam – a question that is so abstract and open-ended that could be easily dodged. In order to truly learn about the reality in Vietnam, one must ask pointed questions such as: Does the government officially recognize the legal status of the Catholic Church in any written document? Does the government treat Catholics just like other citizens? Are Catholics admitted to academies for the military, police and security forces? Can Catholics be appointed to mid-level and high-level government positions? Does the Catholic Church receive the same treatment as other domestic and foreign entities? Does the law protect church property? Has the Church been allowed to publish periodicals, or open schools, publishing houses, health clinics and hospitals, or charitable centers to serve the people? Does the government respect the Church's right to carrying out her traditional religious activities? Can the Catholic Church set up bank accounts or lease land? And other questions along this line...

Actually, the government has been mistreating its Catholic citizens compared to the way it treats foreigners who live and work in Vietnam, and the government's treatment of the Catholic Church is much worse than its treatment of foreign entities that operate in the country. What is more painful is that the other religions and their believers suffer the same treatment as the Catholic Church and our faithful. How can anyone trust that Vietnam enjoys religious freedom when believers and churches are discriminated against and are not free to serve the people, something that the other citizen groups and non-religious organizations may engage in?

2. The nature of Vietnam's Communist Party compels its members to eradicate all religions, or at least, to control them tightly, transform them, oppress them and made them serve the regime's agenda of dominating all aspects of society through the party's policy edicts, laws and actions.

The government still uses the national media and educational system to train various levels of personnel in ways to oppress the Catholic Church and use propaganda against her. The government continues to make false accusations and declare that the Church has committed such and such "crimes" in Vietnam and in other nations. In government-sanctioned books used in schools, there is plenty of libelous material aimed at painting a very negative picture of Catholics, to the point of not being credible. The party still attempts to make non-Catholics view the Church as the evil and dangerous entity that Communists have been imagining forever.

The government continues to use its "divide and conquer" strategy against the various religions and against groups within each religion, using highly sophisticated tactics, particularly in its uneven treatment of different faiths. One could see this clearly when it uses public money (from the taxes that all citizens had paid) to build for Vietnam's Buddhist Sangha, which is controlled by the government, the largest Buddhist temple in Southeast Asia, Bái Đính Temple in Ninh Bình, at the cost of trillions of Vietnamese dollars (tens of millions of U.S. dollars). The government also uses public funds to support Buddhist events such as the World Buddhist Conference V, held in 2008 in Vietnam. On the other hand, it continues to outlaw the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

The same "divide and conquer" policy is applied to the Catholic Church. The government accords a few clergy members and religious institutions certain privileges while oppressing the Catholic orders that speak out against religious persecution by the government.

3. The Communist regime has grown increasingly heavy-handed in its religious persecution in view of the Communist Party's inherent distrust of religion and perpetual dedication to abolish religious life. The government did not engage in the wanton destruction of religious facilities, the abuse of priests and believers, the desecration of religious symbols, etc. as it is doing now. These types of horrendous acts have been occurring more and more frequently since the US government took Vietnam out of the list of Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in 2006. From 2007 to 2011, the regime has carried out the following oppressive measures against the Catholic Church: Seizing land from Thái Hà Parish and the apostolic delegation's land from the Hanoi Archdiocese; seizing land from Tam Tòa Parish, Loan Lý Parish, Thủ Thiêm Parish, the Order of St Paul de Chartres in Vĩnh Long, the Order of St. Vincent de Paul in Saigon, the Order of the Divine Word in Nha Trang, the Order of Heavenly Piece in Huế, the Order of Lasalle in Huế, etc.; demolishing the Virgin Mary's statue in Đồng Đỉnh and the Cross in Đồng Chiêm; removing Mary's statue in Bầu Sen; damaging properties belonging to the Order of St. Paul and the Carmelite Order in Hanoi; razing the Bình Triệu Church in order to build the Law School of HCM City, etc.

Furthermore, the regime has been performing other suppressive acts, including raids, beatings, arrests, dishing out long prison sentences, or prohibiting members of the Church from traveling abroad, and is spearheading a systematic campaign against the Church, using the regime's total control of the media and school curricula, and its influence in various communities. When evaluating the nature and degree of severity of these recent acts, one can conclude that such acts are brazen and arbitrary, and are squarely aimed at the religious establishment. These are the type of acts that the regime did not dare to commit a few decades earlier. The demolition of the Cross and other sacred icons are examples of such acts. In Hanoi, the regime used to refrain from demolishing the Carmelite Monastery with its cross perched high above its roof; in Saigon, the regime used to cover the tower and Cross in the front of the church located near the Bình Triệu Bridge instead of tearing down this Christian symbol. However, since 2007 the regime has shown no such restraint when demolishing these iconic landmarks in an attempt to wipe out all traces of legitimate Church ownership.

Through the regime's numerous acts of repression and oppression directed at all faiths in Vietnam, we have determined that the Communist rulers have been grossly violating religious freedom. Consequently, if someone asserted that "there is religious freedom in Vietnam", we believe that the person either: (1) lies; or, (2) has not spent time to examine thoroughly this issue; or, (3) did something that enabled the police to blackmail him into saying the "official" line; or, (4) is so concerned about his safety and well-being that he must say things that the regime wants him to say; or, (5) the person works for the regime as a police or other security personnel, or in some other capacity. It is our belief that bringing religious freedom to Vietnam is an arduous and very long trip, and anyone who claims that religious freedom exists in Vietnam now is guilty of self-deception, misleading others, and whitewashing the oppressive regime in Vietnam.



