



## THE INDEPENDENT HOA HAO BUDDHISTS - VIET NAM (PGHH)

**Hoa Hao Buddhism (HHB)** is a Buddhist branch founded by [Prophet Huynh Phu So](#) in 1939 at Hoa Hao Village, Chau Doc Province, Vietnam (currently belongs to An Giang Province).

HHB is mostly developed in the Mekong Delta and is currently one of the four most popular religions in Vietnam. The core teaching of HHB is the principle called "The Four Debts of Gratitude": Gratitude to parents and ancestors; Gratitude to one's country; Gratitude to Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha and; Gratitude to fellow countrymen and humanity. HHB encourages followers to lead simple, peaceful agricultural lives while observing Hoa Hao Buddhist principles.

After the military victory in April 1975, the Communist government of Vietnam completely dissolved the administrative structure and confiscated all the properties of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Congregation (HHC). In 1999, the Vietnamese government established an organization called "*Hoa Hao Central Administrative Council*" (*HHCAC*) and gave this latter the monopoly role. Many Hoa Hao adherents do not accept this new organization, believing its state-sponsored character does not comply with the tradition of HHB. Ever since, the independent Hoa Hao followers not registered with this organization are considered illegal and their activities suppressed without mercy.

The Vietnamese government has been committing serious violations of the right to freedom of religion of the Hoa Hao followers, specifically:

1. **Violation of the right to have a religion of one's choice** by forcing independent HH followers to register and accept the control of the state-run HHCAC. Independent HH followers are monitored and frequently assaulted by police. They are economically and socially isolated.
2. **Violation of the right to manifest one's religion in worship**: All worship facilities and religious properties of the traditional HHC were expropriated by the State. Independent Hoa Hao Buddhists are forbidden to come together for commemorating the three major ceremonies observed by HH followers, especially the "Day of Prophet Huynh Victimization" (the day when He was ambushed by communist forces and disappeared).
3. **Violation of the right to manifest one's religion in observance and practice**: Independent HH followers are not permitted to gather to pray or worship at home, in independent temples, or in private prayer halls.
4. **Violation of the right to manifest one's religion in teaching**: The collection called "Preaching through Poetry" by Prophet Huynh, considered the sacred scripture of Hoa Hao, and other original version of Hoa Hao religious scriptures were confiscated and banned from circulation. Anyone who secretly disseminates these materials will be arrested. The government instead published two censored versions of the books, which omits or replaces sections considered "sensitive" to the regime. The authorities violently hinders the teaching of the original HHB doctrine at the independent HH followers' homes. Police officers often set up blockages to prevent the worshipers from gathering and threaten, harass, and beaten them.

Many independent Hoa Hao Buddhists have suffered from brutal oppression.

- [Mr. Bui Van Trung](#) is the patriarch of a family whose 5 members sentenced to a total of 24 years imprisonment and 2 years suspended sentence for refusing to dissolve the Prayer Hall he established at home. Mr. Trung and his son, [Mr. Bui Van Tham](#), are currently behind bars for the second time.
- Mr. [Nguyen Huu Tan](#) was arrested in May 2017 and died less than 10 hours later while in police custody. His gruesome death was ruled a suicide by the authorities. He was from a family with 3 generations persecuted by the Vietnamese government due to their faith.
- [The Venerable Vo Van Thanh Liem](#) is the Abbot of Quang Minh Temple, one of the few, if not the only, independent Hoa Hao temples not under control of the state-run HHCAC. He has been arrested, detained, and imprisoned more than two dozen of times since 1981 and spent more than 10 years in prison. Currently, he is still under constant surveillance by the authorities and frequently insulted and assaulted by local police forces and their henchmen.
- [Mr. Nguyen Van Lia](#), a Hoa Hao preacher, was sentenced to 7 years and six months on two convictions.
- [Mr. Vo Van Buu](#) and his wife, [Mrs. Mai Thi Dung](#), were sentenced to a total of 18 years imprisonment, leaving behind their elderly mother and two young children. While the couple were in prison, their children were also expelled from school.
- On February 9, 2018, in a one-day trial, closed to the public, [6 Hoa Hao Buddhists](#) were sentenced to 22 years imprisonment and 2 years suspended sentence: Bui Van Trung, Le Thi Hen, Bui Thi Bich Tuyen, Bui Van Tham, Le Hong Hanh, Nguyen Hoang Nam.

We call on you to please lend your support to the independent Hoa Hao Buddhists in Viet Nam and be their advocates in demanding the Vietnamese government to respect freedom of religion and stop persecuting independent religious groups.

Please actively monitor prison conditions and treatments toward prisoners of conscience in Vietnam and bring up these issues in all dialogues with the Vietnamese government.

Please encourage diplomatic missions in Vietnam to maintain frequent contacts and periodic visits to the victims' families.