

Statement of Father Le Quoc Thang, speaking on behalf of Association of Con Dau Parishioners And Loc Hung Vegetables Garden.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am Rev. Lê Quốc Thăng, a priest secretary of the Committee of Justice and Peace of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Viet Nam. I would like to speak about violations of the freedom of religion of Catholic communities in Vietnam.

In early January 2019, the government demolished some 500 houses in an area called Loc Hung Vegetables Garden, completely wiping out this 65-years old community of mostly Catholics.

Nearly 1000 persons became homeless. They included disabled veterans from the armed forces of the former Republic of Vietnam staying in a dozen homes built by Redemptorist Order. Residents were not properly notified and have not received adequate compensation.

The brutality against the 150-years old Con Dau Parish appeared to have stopped seven years ago after strong condemnation by the international community. Unfortunately it resumed in late last year. In November 2018, with police escort, demolition teams sent by Da Nang City razed the houses of seven of some 90 families who stayed to defend their parish. These are the remnant of the once-thriving community of 400 families. On May 4, 2010, the Da Nang City police attacked Con Dau Parish during the funeral of a parishioner. Over a hundred parishioners were injured, 61 of them were detained and tortured for days; six were later imprisoned. One parishioner died of severe beating by a member of the local civil defense force.

The government has used non-state actors as instruments of repression. Since April 2017, organized mobs known as the Red Flag Associations, with the support of local governments, have terrorized Catholic communities, particularly those in the Vinh Diocese, beating up parishioners and threatening their priests. In the most recent incident, just last November Red Flag Association members targeted Rev. Dang Huu Nam of My Khanh Parish, threatening to kill him. On February 12, 2019, the government of Quynh Luu District harassed local Catholics and 2 Taiwanese attorneys who were visiting Song Ngoc Parish to study the devastating impacts of the 2016 ecological disaster caused by a Taiwanese steel plant. The Song Ngoc Parish was the first parish targeted by Red Flag Association members.

We urge the Vietnamese government to:

1. Investigate and prosecute Red Flag Association members and colluding government officials for bodily injuries and financial damages caused to citizens;
2. Stop targeting parishes and Catholic communities for land expropriation without due and lawful procedures and fair compensation;
3. Prosecute those police officers responsible for the torture of Con Dau parishioners and the death of one of the victims;
4. Talk to Loc Hung vegetable garden people and deal fairly, respectfully the truth.

Thank you so much!