

NGO Consultation – March 11, 2019

Statement of Pastor Vang Chi Minh, Hmong United for Justice

I am Wa Chi Minh Vang, an ethnic Hmong from Ha Giang Province, Vietnam. I am a Protestant pastor whom the Vietnamese government persecuted for exercising my right to religious freedom and defending the same right of others in our ethnic community. Forced to renounce our faith, my father and I had to escape into the jungle, where my father died. I later got caught by the police and spent 9 years in a prison. Faced with intensifying persecution, in 2005 I had to flee to Thailand. In 2007 I resettled as a refugee to Minnesota, the United States.

The Hmong population forms an indigenous minority in the Northwestern Mountainous Region of Vietnam. For the past 20 years, Hmong Christians have been ordered to renounce their faith and those who resisted were evicted from their villages. Thousands of them migrated to other provinces, where they formed new communities in uninhabited areas, usually at the edge of the jungle. Local governments do not register them as legal residents.

Without household registration, Hmong Christians cannot apply for citizenship ID cards; married couples are not issued marriage certificates; children are often denied birth certificates -- those lucky enough to get birth certificates do not have their father's name listed and are considered fatherless. Most of these children are not admitted into school for lack of household registration.

Without citizenship ID cards, H'Mong Christians cannot get employment, apply for a business license, open a bank account, or even use the public library. They do not have access to public benefits, social welfare, public health care... In brief, they are not treated as citizens in their own country. They are essentially "stateless."

For the past year, I have documented at least 1,100 households, totaling about 5,000 Hmong Christians who became stateless because they did not abandon their faith.

Montagnard Christians, indigenous peoples living in the Central Highlands, face a similar plight. In one district alone, Ia Grai District of Gia Lai Province, there are already over 1000 households of stateless Montagnard Christians.

By using statelessness to punish Hmong and Montagnard Christians, the Government of Vietnam violates the many articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

I respectfully ask this Committee to call on the Government of Vietnam to promptly, effectively and fairly resolve the stateless status of Hmong and Montagnard Christians and to immediately end its policy of forced renunciation of faith.

Thank you.