

Submission by Vietnam Freedom of Religion or Belief Roundtable participants

January 31, 2020

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade,

We, the undersigned members of Vietnam Freedom of Religion or Belief (VFORB) Roundtable, are writing to support legislation in the Australian Parliament to impose targeted sanctions against human rights violators and corrupt government officials.

As many of us come from persecuted religious and minority communities, we are of the opinion that targeted sanctions would put rights violators and corrupt government officials on notice. They will have to think twice before committing another act of persecution or corruption. Many of them have sent their children to study in Australia and other Western countries, transferred a significant portion of their assets overseas and have relocation plans ready in case of political purges or upheavals. Australia's participation in the global efforts to deny them sanctuary would send a clear message that they will have no place to run, nowhere to hide.

VFORB Roundtable, founded in March 2016, is a monthly forum for human rights advocates and representatives of religious organizations to share status updates, best practices and opportunities to collaborate. Participants also occasionally provide mutual assistance and support to victims of religious persecution. One third of the some 250 prisoners of conscience in Vietnam are from persecuted religious/indigenous communities.

Over the past three years we have submitted a dozen reports on rights violations to different UN mandate holders. While we value the UN human rights mechanisms, one major drawback is their lack of sanctioning measures. The application of sanctions by governments against perpetrators would fill this gap.

We therefore call on the Australian Parliament to pass its legislation with provisions on targeted sanctions. Such legislation should include mechanisms to gather inputs from civil society in countries of origin and to coordinate with UN human rights mechanisms.

*Signed by 45 members/leaders of Cao Dai Religion, Catholic communities, Unified Buddhist Church communities, Khmer Krom Buddhist communities, Hmong Christian communities, Montagnard Christian communities and civil society organizations*