



Undocumented Hmong and Montagnard Christians in Vietnam fight for their voting right

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Earlier this month, hundreds of Hmong Christians in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam collectively petitioned government authorities for the issuance of temporary ID cards so they may participate in the next quintennial general elections, to be held on May 23.

“For many years, the local government has not acknowledged the members of our households as lawful residents in our commune. Therefore, we are still without a household registry and identity papers,” wrote the adult members of 118 households in Subdivision 181, Lieng Sronh Commune, Dam Rong District, Lam Dong Province.

For almost two decades, Hmong who converted to Christianity have been evicted or had to flee from their home villages in the Northwestern Highlands as local authorities forced them to renounce their faith. After years on the run, they settled in the jungle of Vietnam’s Central Highlands, where they rebuilt new communities. To apply for new household registration and ID cards, they must secure a letter of reference and support from the government in their home village, which is nearly impossible. Undocumented couples are not issued marriage certificate and many children are without a birth certificate. BPSOS has documented at least ten thousand Hmong and Montagnard Christians in such situations. See: <https://dvov.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Stateless-Hmong-Montagnard-Christians-03-06-19.pdf>

Articles 2, 29, and 30 of the Election Law provide for all citizens aged 18 and up the right to vote and the opportunity to register to vote. However, these articles specify that citizens without a household registry and identity papers may vote for members of the National Assembly and People’s Councils of provinces and districts while not being allowed to vote for members of People’s Councils of communes.

“[W]e respectfully request that you and your agencies review our case and issue without delay temporary identification papers enabling us to exercise our full civil rights and meet our civic obligations in this election cycle,” the said petitioners pleaded.

“The Hanoi government should immediately restore the right to vote of Hmong and Montagnard Christians who have faced mistreatment for not renouncing their faith,” said Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang, CEO & President of BPSOS.

Adult residents of Subdivision 179, also in Lieng Sronh Commune, have similarly petitioned to the same government authorities.

“We are aware of many more petitions being submitted by individuals and by entire communities across the country,” said Dr. Thang.



Residents of Subdivision 179