

September 20, 2022

To: The Steering Committee of International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA)

- Her Excellency Fiona Bruce MP, Prime Minister's Special Envoy, United Kingdom, Steering Committee Chair
- His Excellency Robert Rehak, Ambassador and Special Envoy for Holocaust, Interfaith Dialogue and Freedom of Religion, Czech Republic, Steering Committee Vice-Chair
- The Honorable Rashad Hussain, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, United States, Steering Committee Member
- His Excellency Joao Lucas Quental Novaes de Almeida, Minister, Brazil, Steering Committee Member

Dear IRFBA Steering Committee:

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, are writing to express our deep concern over the harassment and reprisals committed by Vietnamese authorities against individuals and communities for observing the August 22 International Day Commemorating Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, which was established by the UN General Assembly in May 2019. As a member state of the United Nations, the Vietnamese government should have encouraged citizens in marking this day as well as facilitated their participation. As a candidate for the UN Human Rights Council, it is setting an extremely poor example.

In early June 2022, three Montagnard Christians in Cu M'Gar District, Dak Lak Province, were fined 4 million VND each for having observed last year's August 22 International Day. On August 20 of this year, the provincial police forced a group of Cao Dai followers in Long Xuyen City, An Giang Province, to stop their observance ceremony and sign a pledge not to resume it on the following days. On August 22, the police "invited" the leader of another group of Cao Dai followers in Long Xuyen City to the police station and kept him there for 5 hours so that he could not conduct commemorative activities. Similarly, five Montagnard house church leaders in Dak Lak Province were "invited" to the police station on August 22, probably as a ploy to interfere with their observance of this international day. The police of Phu Yen Province was even more oppressive; they "invited" Nay Y Blang, leader of a Montagnard Christian house church in Ea Lam Commune, to "working sessions" at the police station every day after he had officiated an early observance on August 17. Each working session lasted from dawn to late evening. The police threatened that he would end up in prison within this year.

Several of the victims already wrote to government authorities, including Vietnam's President, to seek their explanation of the legal basis for the threats, interference, and penalties directed at them by the police. Many of these religious believers and their communities have been victims of acts of violence in the past because of their faith. Therefore, observing the August 22 International Day bears special meaning for them. Many of these victims, despite the punishments inflicted on them and the continued threats of even more severe punishment, are

determined to exercise their right and support the next United Nations-initiated international day: they plan to observe International Human Rights Day on December 10.

We note that on 22 August, the embassies in Vietnam of seven countries (Austria, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the UK, and the USA) issued a joint statement in support of this international day:

“On this important day, we would like to express our support for the victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief, as well as to their families and loved ones. Today, we honor those who have suffered for exercising their human rights as well as those who defend these rights.

“We urge states and people everywhere to join forces in the fight against violence and discrimination, and in ensuring all individuals can enjoy their human rights in dignity and freedom.”

Reflecting the spirit of this joint statement, we call on IRFBA government members to:

- Collectively express concern at the upcoming UN Human Rights Council session in light of Vietnam’s announced candidacy for a seat on this council;
- Instruct their missions in Vietnam to make a joint request to the Vietnamese government for a thorough investigation the above incidents; and
- Call on human rights officers at their missions in Vietnam to visit communities targeted by the government and/or invite representatives of these communities to meetings in Ha Noi or in Saigon (HCM City).

We thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Organizations:

1. Advocate for Faith and Justice in Vietnam, USA
2. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), Thailand
3. Association for the Advancement of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Vietnam, USA
4. Boat People SOS – Religious Freedom Project, USA
5. Buddhist Solidarity Association, USA
6. Campaign to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA) (Thailand), Thailand
7. Campaign to Abolish Torture in Vietnam, USA
8. Christ’s Mandate for Missions, USA
9. Christian Freedom International, USA
10. Church of Scientology National Affairs Office, USA

11. Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam, USA
12. Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience., France
13. CSW, United Kingdom
14. Decency & Clarity, USA
15. Evangelical Church of Christ of the Central Highlands, Vietnam
16. International Christian Concern, USA
17. International Organization to Preserve Human Rights, USA
18. Jubilee Campaign, United Kingdom
19. Law and Liberty Trust, USA
20. Montagnards Stand for Justice (MSFJ), Thailand
21. Prayer Pioneers, United Kingdom
22. Red Eagle Enterprises, USA
23. Save the Persecuted Christians, USA
24. Southeast Asian Grassroots Alliance (SAGA) - Mekong Working Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief (MEFORB), USA
25. Stichting Vietnam Human Rights Foundation, The Netherlands
26. Vietnam Coalition Against Torture, USA
27. Vietnamese American Community of the USA, USA
28. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights, USA
29. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights, Vietnam

Individuals:

1. Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang, Member of the Council of Experts of IRFBA,
Co-founder of the Southeast Asia Freedom of Religion or Belief (SEAFORB) Network,
Laureate of the 2011 Asia Human Rights and Democracy Award
USA
2. Dr. Trong Quang Phan, Chairman,
Vietnamese American Community of the USA
USA
3. Emmanuel Ihim, Executive Director
Diaspora Alliance
USA

4. A Ga, Pastor in Charge
Evangelical Church of Christ of the Central Highlands
Vietnam
5. Hamid Gharagozloo
International Organization to Preserve Human Rights
USA
6. Loan Vo, Coordinator
Buddhist Solidarity Association
USA
7. Rev. Susan Taylor
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
USA
8. Satoshi Nishihata, Bureau Chief
Happy Science USA Bureau
USA
9. Scott Morgan, President
Red Eagle Enterprises
USA
10. The Honorable Kasit Piromya, Member of ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights,
Former Foreign Minister of Thailand,
Former Ambassador to the United States
Thailand