

Prohibiting Cao Dai followers from gathering at their Tay Ninh Holy See – March 17, 2008

In 1997, the Vietnamese Government transferred to the 1997 Sect property of the Cao Dai Religion that it had placed under state management since 1979, including its Holy See. The only exception was the office of the Legislative Body of the Cao Dai Religion, where members of the Legislative Body were allowed to hold unofficial meetings. The 1997 Sect created an inner quarters security team to keep the Holy See off-limits to followers of the Cao Dai Religion unless they agree to convert to the 1997 Sect. Attempts by Cao Dai followers to gather on the grounds of the Holy See have been dealt with brutally by the 1997 Sect, often with the aid of the public security police.

In early 2008 the Popular Council of the Cao Dai Religion, a network of followers fighting to preserve their faith, announced their plan to convene a gathering of members on March 17 near the “Pagoda Tree”¹ on the grounds of their Holy See. Their intention was to request publicly that the 1997 Sect stop presenting itself as the Cao Dai Religion, give Cao Dai followers access to facilities at their Holy See, and return the Holy See to the Cao Dai Religion. Six days before the event, the Governing Council of the 1997 Sect issued Announcement No. 01/83-HDCQ.TT to condemn the Popular Council of the Cao Dai Religion for *“inciting chaos, causing disunity within the religion, intentionally using deceiving words, tricking the faithful to go down a sinful path in regard to the religion, [and] violating the law.”* On March 14, the public security surrounded the house of Mr. Duong Xuan Luong, suspected of being the mastermind behind the planned event, to arrest him, but he was not at home. The public security then issued an arrest warrant against him. Mr. Luong had to live in hiding until his escape to Thailand in 2016; he arrived in the United States in April 2017 after more than nine years on the run.

Despite this campaign of repression, some 120 followers of the Cao Dai Religion managed to gather at their Holy See on March 17, 2008; they came from the provinces of Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Lam Dong, Binh Thuan, Phu Yen, Buon Me Thuot, Binh Dinh, Long An, Dong Thap, and Kien Giang, among others. At 8:00 am they entered the Holy Shrine to pray, but soon the inner quarters security personnel escorted each and every one of them so that they could not gather, and blocked them from coming near the Pagoda Tree, around which a new fence had been erected. The few who succeeded in coming near the Pagoda Tree were immediately dragged away. On the following days, Tay Ninh Newspaper, the official organ of the VCP’s Provincial Committee, published three back-to-back articles denouncing the Popular Council of the Cao Dai Religion to be unlawful and disrespectful of God.

¹ The Pagoda Tree had been a common gathering place for Cao Dai followers visiting their Holy See.



State media denouncing Cao Dai followers of being unlawful and disrespectful of God, dated March 18, 2008