

VIETNAM



Vietnam Democracy is published monthly by the Free Vietnam Alliance (FVA), a coalition of 35 Vietnamese democratic movements worldwide. Its purpose is to inform the international community of news and developments in Vietnam -- especially those that do not make it to the outside world -- and to share the Vietnamese effort and dream for democracy. We welcome all support and comments to make this a valuable forum.

Subscription is US\$12 plus US\$12 postage for outside the USA. Please contact the respective offices for more information or change of address:

FREE VIETNAM ALLIANCE:

In Europe:
B.P. 203
75624 Paris Cedex 13 - FRANCE
Tel: (33) 1 56 30 96 12
Fax: (33) 1 56 30 96 22

In North America:
7245 Garden Grove Blvd. Suite F
Garden Grove, CA 92841 - USA.
Tel + Fax: (714) 893 - 5457

Liaison Office in Asia:
P.O.Box 22
Chidori Tokyo 146 - 8691 - JAPAN
Tel + Fax: (81) 3 37 68 6104

Liaison Office in Australia:
P.O. Box 904, Cabramatta
NSW 2166, AUSTRALIA
Tel+Fax: (61) 2 9791 9370

Web sites:
Vietnamese: <http://www.lmvntd.org/>
English: <http://www.fva.org/>
Email: lmvntd@fva.org

DEMOCRACY

Vol. X
No.6
Jun
2001

A Monthly Publication of the Free Vietnam Alliance

Pagoda-painted Prisons



To deflect the watchful eyes of the international human rights organizations and foreign reporters stationed in Vietnam, the government of this country has increasingly resorted to the use of private homes and pagodas as prison cells for their very own residents. This practice is well covered by the Government's infamous Decree 31/CP which authorizes cadres down to the district level to detain anyone without even going through the current Party-controlled court systems — and

thus avoiding external human rights observation.

While most secular dissidents like Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, Dr. Nguyen Thanh Giang, Dr. Ha Si Phu, Gen. Tran Do, etc. are kept behind the walls of their houses, Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, 83, the Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) has spend 17 of his 19 years of detention at various pagodas in remote rural areas. Currently, he is kept at the Phuoc Quang Pagoda in Quang Ngai province and in critically poor health.

In Saigon, thanks to Mr. Olivier Dupuis's courageous entry into the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery (Details on the trip are on the next page), we now know government agents, both in uniform and undercover, not only surround the Pagoda but also station on every floor of the structure. Venerable Thich Quang Do, the second highest leader of the UBCV and a Nobel Prize Nominee, has been locked up in one room since June 3, 2001. Ven. Thich Quang Do had expressed his wish to lead a delegation to Quang Ngai on June 7 to bring the Church's Patriarch to Saigon for medical treatment.

All other high-ranking monks of the UBCV share the same fate of pagoda-arrests. Ven. Thich Tue Sy at the Gia Lam Pagoda in Saigon, for example, does his daily works while several Public Security agents stationing 4 meters from his desk to openly listen to all phone calls.

Meanwhile, the Government continues to take its revenge on the parishioners of Nguyet Bieu and An Truyen after taking away their spiritual leader, Father Nguyen Van Ly, on May 17, 2001. Three members of Father Ly's family have been taken away. The whereabouts of two of them are unknown. □

Statement from the Office of Mr. Olivier Dupuis On His Trip and Protest in Saigon:

VIETNAM: FREEDOM FOR THE PATRIARCH
THICH HUYEN QUANG AND FOR THE
VENERABLE THICH QUANG DO.

OLIVIER DUPUIS, MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT AND SECRETARY OF THE TRANSNATIONAL
RADICAL PARTY, CONTINUES HIS NON-VIOLENT PROTEST
WITH A DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE THE PAGODA OF
THICH QUANG DO FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN VIETNAM.

Brussels-Saigon, 6 June 2001.

This morning at 3.00 am Brussels time (8.00 am local time) Olivier Dupuis, Member of the European Parliament and Secretary of the Transnational Radical Party, entered the Pagoda of Thanh Minh in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) with the intention of staying inside until the Vietnamese authorities annul the arbitrary decision to detain the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang and the Venerable Thich Quang Do.

The Pagoda of Thanh Minh, where the Venerable Thich Quang Do is confined due to a restriction order, is besieged by plainclothes Vietnamese police officers, who remain inside checking on whoever comes in and on the monks who live there, and blocking access to the room of the Venerable. As a result Olivier Dupuis was not able to meet the Venerable Thich Quang Do, as he had planned, for the religious leader has been locked in his room since the detention order was imposed without any sort of trial. At 6.30 am Brussels time (11.30 am local time), Dupuis was forced by the Vietnamese police to leave the Pagoda.

Olivier Dupuis will demonstrate outside the Pagoda of Thanh Minh from 10.30 am Brussels time (3.30 PM local time), with banners demanding religious freedom in Vietnam and the release of the two religious leaders under arbitrary house arrest. He will then try to meet the Venerable Thich Quang Do and to lock himself voluntarily in the same Pagoda.

Statement by Olivier Dupuis:

"As well as the issue of its legitimacy, the Vietnamese regime has violated its own laws by extending the restriction order on the Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang - whose "immediate and unconditional release" was called for by the European Parliament in its resolution of 16 November 2000 - and by sentencing the deputy head of the Church, the Venerable Thich Quang Do - without trial - to a strict form of house arrest. As well as demonstrating the lack of religious freedom in Vietnam, this development is also a sign that the Hanoi authorities have no intention of moving towards democracy. It is high time, as the European Parliament has been demanding for a long time, that the authorities of the European Union took due action." □

International Reactions to Recent Religious Oppressions in Vietnam

Following are samples of the reactions of the world community toward the government's arrest of Father Nguyen Van Ly and its prevention of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam from bringing Ven. Thich Huyen Quang, 83, to Saigon for urgent medical treatment.

Excerpts from the letter of the WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR to the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV):

...

The World Confederation of Labour, which represents 135 trade union organisations in 115 countries, has just learnt of the arrest, by police forces, of Father Tadeo Nguyen Van Ly, catholic priest, whose social, humanitarian and educational activities on behalf of the poor are highly appreciated and whose aspirations for human rights and in particular for freedom of religion are well-known to our male and female trade union activists.

The World Confederation of Labour has always had great sympathy for the Vietnamese people and does not wish to interfere with the internal affairs of the State. However, remaining true to its values and principles, the WCL cannot but express its anxiety about the police persecution of 54-year-old Father Ly and the Buddhist patriarch Thich Huyen Quang, 83 years old and living already for 19 years in exile, both known for their defence of justice.

For these reasons we ask you to take the necessary steps for the release of Father Ly and the Buddhist Patriarch Huyen Quang and for the ensurance of their physical and moral integrity, thus allowing serenity to return in the hearts of all Vietnamese. The image of Vietnam in the world will only gain by it.

(Signed by Secretary General Willy Thys)

Excerpts from the statement of Mr. Lars Rise, Member of the Norwegian and a long-time human rights advocate:

...

The arrest of Father Nguyen Van Ly on May 17, 2001 by the Vietnamese authorities is a blatant violation of human rights. According to news reports, over 600 security personnel surrounded the An Truyen church, beat worshippers, and forcibly removed the Catholic priest. This action demonstrates both a disregard for human rights and the government's callousness toward its own citizens, says Lars Rise who is a member of parliament in Norway and also member of the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. On the 9th of April he was arrested himself while visiting with Father Ly in his church as about 100 police officers surrounded the church. He was kept for two days before he was escorted to the airport to be sent out of the country.

- I had the honor of meeting Father Ly in his church in An Truyen during my trip to Vietnam in April. He is a brave man with a strong faith in God and the value of freedom. I have followed his writings which have advocated for basic liberties, including independent religious worship, Mr. Rise says.

- During my trip to Vietnam I had also the experience of being forcibly taken away from An Truyen by security police. As much as this was a personal shock for me, it was even more an example of the depths at which the Vietnamese authorities repress individuals who hold different views.

- I was happy to learn from Father Ly and the Venerables Thich Thien Hanh and Thich Thai Hoa, both of whom I had met, that Vietnamese religious leaders have organized an Inter-religious Council (Hoi Dong Lien Ton Doan Ket Quoc Noi Viet Nam) to advance their common demand. Now, especially, is the time to bring attention to the Vietnamese government's record on religious rights and to work for the freedom of all religions in Vietnam.

- I join with the international community in calling for the immediate and unconditional freedom of Father Nguyen Van Ly and that of other religious leaders currently detained in Vietnam, says Lars Rise.

Excerpts from the letter of Mr. Gene Green, Member of the US Congress, to the Prime Minister of the SRV:

...

Religious tolerance is the most fundamental individual right a person can have because, regardless of whether you are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian, freedom to worship transcends political ideology. Holding Father Ly once again demonstrates that your government is incapable of discerning political dissent from the simple exercising of one's faith. I urge you to immediately release Father Ly and recognize both his and his flock's right to follow a higher power than the government in Hanoi.

Your actions will directly influence my voting stance on all free trade issues between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. I cannot, in good conscience, support any economic measures that would reward Vietnam when it continues to arbitrarily imprison its citizen for exercising their religious beliefs. The Vietnam conflict ended over two decades ago and your government to stifle any perceived dissent indicates to me that the Communism in Vietnam is seriously flawed and will cease to exist in the near future.

As a sign of good faith, I urge you to release Father Ly and other religious prisoners, and allow differing religious views to be heard.

Excerpts from the statement of Ms. Zoe Lofgren, Member of the US Congress:

...

I am outraged to hear reports of increased arrests by the Vietnamese government of religious leaders. Reuters News reports that the Vietnamese government has again targeted Father Nguyen Van Ly of the Roman Catholic Church in Vietnam, and the Most Venerable Thich Huyen Quang and

the Venerable Thich Quang Do of the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

Only yesterday, I co-chaired a bi-partisan investigation into religious persecution in Vietnam. One of the honored witnesses, Father Nguyen Van Ly, sent a written statement from Vietnam on the suppression of the Roman Catholic Church. Yesterday he was arrested for handing out leaflets at a religious service yesterday in Hue, Vietnam. The government has denounced him as a traitor for distributing 'anti-communist propaganda.'

This disturbing event coincided with the police interrogation of a dissident Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Do, who had been asking for the release of the Buddhist church leader, Thich Huyen Quang. Mr. Quang has been in prison for 19 years for his religious activities. The International Buddhist Information Bureau has reported that the Vietnamese police warn of a 'CIA plot' to kill Mr. Do. The IBIB fears that this warning indicates a possible Vietnamese governmental assassination plot and cover-up.

These recent incidents indicate an increased crack-down of religious freedom in Vietnam. It underscores the importance of yesterday's hearing. I call on Secretary of State Colin Powell to investigate this matter immediately and to put diplomatic pressure on the government of Vietnam to free these brave religious leaders.

As we enter into trade talks with Vietnam, the government must ensure the basic human rights of the Vietnamese people. Vietnam must allow the basic human right of free and open religious expression.

Excerpts from the letter of Mr. Hermann Grohe, Member of the German Bunderstag and Spokesman on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid of the CDU/CSU-Parliamentary Group, to the Prime Minister of the SRV:

...

Father Ly's social, humanitarian and educational activities for the people in Vietnam are highly respected and appreciated. His aspirations for religious freedom and human rights are well known to the representatives of the German Parliament, particularly to the representatives of the Christian Democratic Party.

We have always had strong sympathy for the Vietnamese people and do not wish to interfere with the internal affairs of the State. However, we cannot but express our anxiety about the police persecution of 54-year-old Father Ly and the Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Thich Huyen Quang, 83 year old and living already for 19 years in "home exile", both known for their voices of conscience and their defence for justice, compassion and human rights.

For these reasons, we ask you to take necessary steps for the release of Father Nguyen Van Ly and the Buddhist Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and for the ensurance of their physical and moral integrity, thus allowing serenity to return in the hearts of all Vietnamese.

Excerpts from the statement of Mr. Ripoll, Member of the Australian Parliament:

...

The Catholic priest has been arrested and detained because, allegedly, he 'defied the order and continued to slander the party and government policies on religious freedom'. Father Ly is not new to being arrested or held in detention for his campaign for religious freedom. Father Ly spent 10 years in jail between the years 1970 and 1990, and since 1992 has been kept under strict police supervision. These events are very sad because religious freedom is one of the most sacred of human rights. It is paramount to the freedom of speech and the freedom of faith.

I know that the Vietnamese community in Australia are very deeply disturbed and saddened by the arrest of Father Ly and see this move as a huge setback for freedom of religion, speech, and media in Vietnam. If the Vietnamese authorities and the Vietnamese people are to grow and prosper economically and spiritually, then before any other progress is made, the most essential growth of the nation must first take place – that is, the freedom to express one's personal faith. I pray this happens soon.

Excerpts from the press release of the Texas Friends For A Free Vietnam Committee:

...

The said abuses by Vietnamese government are inhuman and against the international human rights standards, which are guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam ratified in 1982.

We, the Texas Friends for A Free Vietnam Committee, a coalition of human rights activists and freedom-loving people in State of Texas:

1) Strongly protest the Vietnamese government for its serious violations of basic human rights and strongly condemn the oppressive actions against the religious leaders: Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang, Rev. Thich Quang Do, Father Nguyen Van Ly and Mr. Le Quang Liem... Hanoi must release all the imprisoned religious leaders immediately and unconditionally.

2) Express total support for Rev Thich Quang Do's trip to Central Vietnam to bring the Most Venerable Thich Huyen Quang back to Ho Chi Minh City for medical treatment.

3) Urgently call on the United States Administration and Congress to postpone the ratification of the Trade Agreement with Vietnam until Hanoi releases all imprisoned religious leaders and other prisoners of conscience.

4) Urgently call on the international community of democratic countries, organizations and the media to apply pressure on the government of Vietnam to stop the harassment and persecution of religious leaders including Father Nguyen V. Ly, Rev. Thich Huyen Quang, Thich Quang Do, Thich Khong Tanh, Thich Quang Hue, Thich Tan An and Mr. Le Quang Liem. □

Attacks on Parishioners

After arresting their spiritual leader, Father Tadeus Nguyen Van Ly, on May 17, 2001, the Vietnamese Communist Government has unleashed its cadres on the parishioners of Nguyet Bieu, Hue province, Vietnam. Since November 2000, Father Ly and the parishioners of Nguyet Bieu and An Truyen parishes have openly demanded freedom of religion for all in Vietnam. On June 20, 2001, Father Ly's niece - Nguyen Thi Hoa - and nephews - Nguyen Van Cuong and Nguyen Van Dung - were taken away by the Government Public Security force.

Following is the translation of a report of one of the government's latest harassments on the defenseless parishioners.

CRIS FOR HELP FROM NGUYET BIEU PARISH

Hue, June 16th, 2001,

Yesterday (June 15th, 2001), one day after the parishioners of Nguyet Bieu demanded the return of the ownership of the strip of land to the left of the church, 6 parishioners were summoned by the Vietnamese communist government for interrogations.

- 1- Vo Van Op (70 years old)
- 2- Hoang Trong Nguoi (45 years old)
- 3- Hoang Trong Khuyech (38 years old)
- 4- Hoang Trong Cuong (36 years old)
- 5- Le Xuan (46 years old)
- 6- Hoang Trong Zung (21 years old).

In the morning of June 15th, 2001 the above parishioners reported to the People Committee Office of Thuy Bieu Ward. Each of them was seated in a separate room to be interrogated by a Public Security cadre from the Thua Thien-Hue Province's Security and Investigation Department. The subject of interrogations for the morning was the parish's land and related matters through questions and answers.

The 6 parishioners reported back at the Office at 14:00 on the same day to continue "working". The cadres ordered each of them write a report on the land preparation by the Nguyet Bieu parishioners on June 14th, 2001 with questions such as:

- How many people worked on the field ? Write down their names.
- Who led the land preparation party ?
- What were the parishioners' intention when they started to work on the land ? Did they not know they were violating the laws of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam ?
- Promise to the cadres not to repeat the violations.

At the end, all parishioners, however, insisted their conducts were proper and violating no laws. They uniformly answered that the lot of land was donated by their ancestors to the church a long time ago to raise money for the worship services. The government has blatantly robbed the land since 1977. In recent years, Father Ly and Pastor Tran Van Qui filed complaints to the authorities requesting a final solution for the matter. However, the government not only ignored

our requests but also took the land again by force on June 13th, 2001. There is nothing wrong with our working on our own land. Finally, nobody signed any papers admitting wrongdoing.

As for Zung, the youngest of the summoned parishioners, his luck with the communist agents was particularly bad. That afternoon, communist cadre Nguyen Tuong Vinh “worked” with Zung and asked him to write a report but he refused to comply. When asked why, Zung replied: “I have declared everything that needs to be said and already signed that declaration. That is enough. I will write no other report.” Unable to force him to comply, another cadre, Huynh Van Tien, landed two punches on Zung’s face then ordered him to sign a promise not to violate the laws in the future. Zung, again, courageously refused to sign. The cadres asked: “How dare you refuse to write the report. Are you trying to fight the laws and the government? When you are summoned to work with the Public Security, it is your duty to obey whatever the cadres ask you to do.” Zung responded: “You cadres have the right to give orders and I have the right to comply or not because I have not been proved a criminal. I am just an ordinary citizen who has no means to fight the government. I will not sign any promises because doing that would mean I am planning to violate the laws.”

The next Public Security cadre, Major Nguyen Van Hoa — who, as Hue’s Deputy Chief of Public Security force, signed all the orders to summon the parishioners — authorized the video taping of the session. He then threatened Zung with all kinds of punishment. Afterwards, they brought forth a ready-made report, titled “Report of Violations” of the land laws, listing the articles of the land laws and the criminal codes being infringed and the amount of fine for each count, from 1 to 5 million dongs, and asked Zung to sign. When Zung refused for the reason of committing no crime, Huynh Van Tien landed four more brutal punches on his face.

Failing to force Zung to sign, the Public Security brought in two local cadres — the chief and deputy chief of Public Security of Thuy Bieu Ward — to witness and sign the report on Zung’s behalf. Then they introduced yet another report, the Working Session Report, for Zung to sign. After reading it, Zung again refused to sign for it was incomplete. Zung insisted: “During the working session this afternoon, cadre Tien hit me. Why is that beating not recorded in the report? If you add that clause, I will sign the report.” The cadres did not add to the report but again brought in ostentatious witness and signed the report for Zung.

So for insisting on the Truth being reported, Zung received six such punches on the face. What a shameless regime!

On Monday, June 18th, 2001, Zung and other will have to report for further “working”. Nobody knows what will happen to them!

Please keep praying for one another!

"Special Correspondent from Hue"

** Translation notes: The Vietnamese communist authorities call all forms of interrogations as “working” or “working sessions”. □

A Story to Be Told

O Lord,
I am just dew on a leaf
Soon to vanish, no trace to leave
Rev. Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly

The author of the poem knows how tiny and ephemeral life can be in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Father Nguyen Van Ly, pastor of Nguyet Bieu, a tiny parish of the archdiocese of Hue, the central province of Vietnam, is also the author of many declarations regarding religious freedom, or the lack of it, due to persistent, methodical, and systematic oppression by the communist government in the country.

The story of Father Ly remarkably resembles the life of the Lord Himself. Ordained by the late Archbishop Phillip Nguyen Kim Dien of Hue, and until his arrest in his 30’s in 1977 soon after the communists came to dominate the entire country, Cha (Father) Ly had been living in quiet obedience as his bishop’s secretary. His own fate has been sealed after an attempt to bring a communique of the outspoken bishop, denouncing the persecution of the Church and other religions by the regime, to the south to smuggle it abroad, for such publication is banned inside the country. The archbishop had been expressing his sympathy for several leading Buddhist monks, including Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, who were arrested following their appeal for more tolerance toward religion; and at the same time deploring the same fate of Catholics, who were considered second-class citizens, unfit for advancing to higher education but doomed for the “new economic zones” (kinh te moi) established by the regime. For that statement the bishop paid dearly with his life, shortly afterward being subjected to police interrogations (communist mental tortures), and put under house arrest until his death in 1988.

Cha Ly came in and out of prison several times until his final release in 1988, resolved, in his own words, “to follow the example of the Vietnamese Martyr Saints, seminarian John Marcel Nguyen Tan Van who died for the faith on October 7, 1959 in camp Yen Binh 2, near Ha Noi, the Church and the silent Council of Bishops of China and, in the most recent time, the late bishop Phillips Nguyen Kim Dien, who was under misery for the faith and died for the faith on June 8, 1988 in Saigon”. Firmly believing in the Christian call to prophecy, while describing himself as only a “tiny” (nho be) and “undeserving” priest, he sent out many documents to try to attract the attention of the free world to the muffled voice of the suffering Church. His “State of the Vietnamese Catholic Church”, first published in November 1994, provided evidences of a no less firm resolution of the communist regime to suppress religions and religious freedom in Vietnam, by attrition. Cold, calculated techniques such as confiscation of religious institutions; isolation and arrest of prominent religious leaders (with charges of “being reactionary” prior to the fall of the Soviet block, now elegantly reworded as “threatening the security of the state” or the “socialism-building legacy”); beating, summary trials, detention, and covert murder of little known believers; requiring government approval in all matters of religious life, including admission to seminaries and ordination of priests...; there are so many ways the regime has been using to put out what communists consider “the opium of the people”, called faith by the Vietnamese in all denominations of Hoa Hao,

Cao Dai, Phat Giao (Buddhism), Tin Lanh (Protestant), and Catholic.

Sent to the parish of Nguyet Bieu, but disapproved and ordered to stop in his priestly ministry by the regime, Cha Ly was expected to be doomed in the poor and remote, rural area of Hue. But again he came out in protest, re-publishing his previous declarations, and appealing to the entire Church, as well as to other religions' faithful, to courageously accept their oppressed fate by not co-operating with the regime, by carrying out their vocations without soliciting government approval, and if necessary underground. If persecution results, it would have been expected, and it will show more clearly the real face of the regime that has always been trying to portray itself as a stable, legalistic, and cooperative society. It seems his appeal is being heard at the top hierarchy of the Church, as seen through a recent quiet pastor appointment.

The regime's reaction has been as expected. Following the re-publication of his declarations abroad on the feast of Vietnamese martyrs, November 24, 2000, the local government moved in and confiscated farmlands belonging to the archdiocese and Nguyet Bieu's parishioners. Led by Cha Ly, they put up signs declaring "We need religious freedom" on the land, only to be removed by vigilantes while officials tricked him into discussions and retained him inside a classroom he previously set up. Again he redrew the signs and a new one, declaring "Religious freedom, or death", that he himself climbed up to put at the top of the parish church to avoid any "accident" to his flock. This time officials could not openly remove the signs; they had to send in various representatives, including policemen and a high-ranking counter-intelligent officer. The visits were apparently to talk to him, but more likely to cow his parishioners, and to quietly observe the ways in and out of the parish for a quick arrest when the urge arises, as Cha Ly astutely observed, "I know, because I have been arrested many times before". The courteous talks were not only aimless but also fruitless, as these representatives were never able to reply adequately to Cha Ly's question of whether religion is truly free when religious orders have to seek government approval for appointment to any level of the hierarchy, for any publication, and for any movement of priests inside the country.

Outside the country, thanks to the modern communication technologies and efforts by many people, a petition campaign to support religious freedom in Vietnam has been organized throughout December 2000, together with photos and news updates from the tiny parish (www.lenduong.net). The campaign has been widely successful, gathering more than 17,000 signatures from mostly Vietnamese all around the world, but also many priests, Monsignors, and dignitaries in politics, such as US Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez. Many more declarations followed, most importantly a "Declaration on the Religious Policy of Communists in Vietnam", co-signed by Venerable Thich Thien Hanh (Buddhist), Mr. Le Quang Liem (Hoa Hao), Rev. Father Chan Tin (Redemptorist), and Rev. Father Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly (Pastor, Catholic priest), which exposes the regime's forceful treatment of all religions in Vietnam through aforementioned arbitrary measures and demands full respect of religious freedom by the regime, as a signatory of the International Convention of Human Rights of September 24, 1982, as well as immediate restitution of confiscated properties. The regime has not been idle, cutting Internet access from the parish, and very actively disturbing interviews from outside the country to the religious leaders' cellular phones, their last lifeline. It came up

with an impersonation trick on the Internet to repudiate Cha Ly's demand for religious freedom, only to be exposed immediately after by Ven. Hanh and Cha Ly. Lastly officials have contacted and pressured the See of Hue to tone down Cha Ly's demand, and to ask him to "wait for the government to examine" the case. "We have been waiting for 50 years", Cha Ly said in a declaration sent abroad, referring to the oppression that has been carried out in North Vietnam since before the fall of the South.

Despite the tension and many threats to himself and his old or young parishioners, Cha Ly remains joy- and hope-filled, convinced that "the truth belongs to us", and "always ready to forgive, because men do not know what they do". He seems to echo the message of love and forgiveness preached by Archbishop Nguyen Van Thuan, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who was a prisoner himself in Vietnam for 13 years until his exile, to the Roman Curia in retreats to prepare for the Jubilee year. Cha Ly continues to celebrate daily Mass, teaches catechism and gives elementary instructions to the children. He organized a celebration complete with presents for the children for Christmas, when he baptized and added 17 more individuals to his small flock of 150, in a fearless and seemingly paradoxical defiance to the parish's surroundings, where lately about 200 policemen have moved in wait. He is nonetheless aware of having reached the point of no return, only asking people anywhere to pray for him to have enough strength to "accomplish the task the Lord has given me that I cannot delegate to anyone else. "The Lord has shown me a place to stand, I have no right to flee." Cha Ly has made known to many that if words can no longer be heard from him, or the religious leaders who stand by him, it would mean he has gone on hunger strike indefinitely - a move he previously made in December last year only to be canceled a few days later on friends' advice, and to avoid leaving his flock headless then- to protest any harm done to himself or any one of his dear parishioners.

No one yet knows how things will turn out; the regime resolute but desperate for having been finally unmasked, and confused in their greedy and conflicting sharing of the seized lands amongst corrupt officials and their relatives; the people and religious leaders no less firm in their struggle for a just cause, the support of which has been spreading not only abroad but also in the country. The regime is planning to legitimize their laws, including the current practices of religious regulations, in the upcoming Communist/only Party meetings to prepare for the country's Parliament Grand Reunion. Many religious leaders and priests have now joined Cha Ly in a call to boycott the Party's scheme by not responding to a short-noticed, ill-prepared survey.

There is a worn path on the stony walk at the archdiocesan See of Hanoi. Father Nguyen Huu Le, a chaplain priest from South Vietnam now residing in New Zealand, has inquired about it on a visit after his release from prison in a remote jungle of northern Vietnam. He was told by Cardinal Trinh Van Can the path was all that was left by the late Cardinal Trinh Nhu Khue of Hanoi, who used to walk silently, in utmost isolation inside his See. Such heroic suffering at all levels of the Church hierarchy and believers can no longer be tolerated.

It just has to be told.

Tan Nguyen
January 2001

□

Crackdown on Highland Minorities Continues

Vietnamese agents active on Cambodian soil

AP - Phnompenh, Cambodia - May 24, 2001

An international refugee advocacy group charged Thursday that Vietnamese security agents were hunting down fleeing Vietnamese hill tribespeople on Cambodian soil.

Refugees International also accused the Vietnamese government of enforcing unjust policies that have forced ethnic minority tribespeople, the Montagnards, to flee from Vietnam's Central Highlands to Cambodia since February.

"Vietnam has made the problem worse by sending military and police officials across the border to hunt down refugees and bring them back to Vietnam," Lionel Rosenblatt, president emeritus of the Washington D.C.-based Refugees International, said in a letter to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

"Vietnam must stop forcing people to flee and must stop violating Cambodia's sovereignty by sending its military and police officials across the border," wrote Rosenblatt.

The letter comes less than a week after the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees set up a camp now occupied by some 160 asylum seekers outside Sen Monorom, the capital of the isolated Monduliri province.

Vietnam's ambassador to Cambodia, Nguyen Duy Hong, and Monduliri police commissioner, Col. Reach Samnang, denied Thursday that Vietnamese operatives were active on Cambodian soil.

Hong also repeated previous claims by Hanoi that "outside elements" used "propaganda" to encourage the hill tribespeople to flee into Cambodia.

Rosenblatt returned to Phnom Penh on Wednesday after spending two days in Monduliri where he met with government, military and police officials, and aid workers and refugees in Sen Monorom. "There is every indication that Vietnamese military and police officials are actively engaged in searching on Vietnamese and Cambodian soil, and the Cambodian government has been forced to acquiesce to this," he said in an interview.

The United Nations already granted refugee status to at least 38 ethnic minorities from the Central Highlands. They were resettled in the U.S. state of North Carolina in April.

The acting director of UNHCR in Cambodia, John Farvolden, said Thursday that the United Nations discovered this week about 50 more ethnic minorities from Vietnam in Ratanakiri province. He said the group is being lodged near the town of Banlung.

41 People On Trial For Highlands Unrest

AP - Hanoi, Vietnam - June 18, 2001

Vietnam will hold a mass trial in two weeks for 41 people accused of plotting unrest during mass protests in the Central Highlands, a court official said Monday.

Seven of the defendants are charged with damaging national security, 20 with fighting enforcement officials and 14 with disturbing public order, he said.

"These people were involved in two rounds of unrest, the first in Pleiku February 2 and another in Chu Se district March 10," the official said.

Earlier this year, huge demonstrations by mainly Christian ethnic minorities over complaints about land encroachment and religious repression broke out in the highland provinces of Daklak and Gia Lai. The rare public protests shocked the communist government, which quickly called in army and riot police to quell the disturbances.

The trial, which will be held in Gia Lai province, is the second one involving the minority unrest. In April, state media announced that Vietnam would prosecute 11 people in neighboring Daklak province who allegedly incited riots and engaged in sabotage during ethnic minority protests in February.

Vietnamese officials have accused an overseas emigre group, the Montagnard Foundation, of masterminding the protests.

"The defendants have admitted that they received instructions from overseas counter-revolutionary elements to organize unrest activities in the province," the official said.

After the government crackdown, hundreds of demonstrators fled to neighboring Cambodia to escape the clampdown, officials in the remote border region say.

A group of 38 people detained by Cambodian authorities were later resettled in the United States after being granted refugee status by the United Nations. □

RADIO BROADCASTS TO VIETNAM RUN BY FREE VIETNAMESE:

1. *New Horizon (Chân Tr^oi M^Ũi):*

9:00 - 9:30 pm Vietnam time on 9965 khz

2. *Radio Free Asia (Á Châu T₂ Do)*

7:30 - 8:30 am Vietnam time

on 5865 khz and 7415 khz

9:00 - 10:00 pm Vietnam time

on 5865 khz, 6240 khz and 7520 khz

VOICE OF THE MASSES

In early June 2001, Venerable Thich Tue Si of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam sent his letter of protest to the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Inspectorate.

He then forwarded that letter to the highest offices of the Vietnamese Communist Party and Government with the following cover-letter.

Ven. Thich Tue Si were incarcerated for a total of 7 years for his calls for religious freedom in Vietnam. He is currently held under effective house-arrest at the Gia Lam Pagoda in Saigon.

To:

Mr. Nong Duc Manh

Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party

Mr. Phan Van Khai

Prime Minister of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

I, undersigned as Pham Van Thuong, am a Buddhist monk of the religious name Thich Tue Sy. My residence is the Gia Lam Pagoda at 498/11 Le Quang Dinh street, ward 1, Go Vap district, HCM City.

I would like to forward to you, the Secretary General and the Prime Minister, the letter of protest I had sent to the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Inspectorate of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Even though the Party Central and the Government are not directly responsible for the illegal and arbitrary conducts listed in my letter of protest, everyone knows the People's Court and People's Inspectorate are but instruments of the Proletarian Dictatorial power. Therefore, this letter of protest, in fact, is the indictment against the Party Central and the Government themselves. For that reason, I thought the letter should be sent to the highest offices of the Party and the Government.

Given the administrative process of a bureaucracy filled with those who are experts on corruption and harassing and oppressing people rather than building this country as often claimed, I

know this letter will have to travel through many layers before reaching the gate of the supreme leaders who always find ways to deny responsibilities and to claim only glory and greatness. I am also sure that letters of this kind will never be looked at by officials who are supposed to answer to the destitution and backwardness of the country as well as the corruption in the ruling machine.

One thing is for certain. The mindless and thoughtless brutality will never listen to the voices of conscience and logic. I, therefore, have to depend on the modern communication technology to send my thought to everyone who has not been blinded by evil ambitions, inside and outside the country. I am fully responsible for what I say and willing to accept whatever punishment that might follow.

Ultimately, history will never forgive those intellects who have benefited from the contribution of the entire population to obtain the highest level of education and now keep silent toward the injustice and suffering of the people out of fear or in exchange for privileges. I am, therefore, willing to [pay my debt] in risking my life and my dignity as a human being [to raise my protest]. I am not afraid to face the deadly iron fists of the dictatorial violence without any means of self defense, including the legal one. I am not afraid to die from the brutal revenge of the regime just as many respectable and honorable people before me have accepted as the price to maintain the conscience and the most beautiful values of the Vietnamese people.

Messrs. Secretary General and Prime Minister,

I am sure you know much more than I about the things that were and are happening to this country and who are responsible for them. Given the current blockade and isolation being imposed on me by the authorities through various lowly tactics, my knowledge of society is indeed limited. The actual situation could be much worse than what I have seen or learnt. However, I can only say what I myself have seen and learnt.

This letter of protest, for the abovementioned reasons, was not sent to the Party and the Government through the proper channels as defined by the cumbersome administrative regulations of the socialist system. I want to walk to the gate of the dictatorial authority myself. Despite my full knowledge that I would be squashed long before I could even see the blur image of the absolute power far away, I still want to drag my body forward as an apology to my fellow-citizens that I have been so useless before the silent and tremendous suffering of my people.

□