

VIETNAM



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OVERSEAS VIETNAMESE PRIESTS VOICE SUPPORT for Religious Struggle at Home

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.

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On August 15, 2001, Vietnamese Catholic priests around the world jointly announced their view on the current condition of religious oppression in Vietnam. The announcement was organized and read by Father Tran Quy Thien during a press conference at the Mother of Vietnam Parish in Washington D.C.



Rev. Nguyen Van Ly

This joint statement, carrying 142 signatures to the day of announcement, will be sent to the Pope, the Catholic Church of Vietnam, governments of the free world, and international human rights organization.

Similar signature drives are being carried out among Vietnamese Catholic communities around the world.

Following is the FVA's translation of the Joint Statement

Joint Statement of Overseas Vietnamese Catholic Priests

We, the undersigned overseas Vietnamese priests, would like to express our deep concerns about the conditions of religions in Vietnam, particularly that of the Catholic Church.

Being Vietnamese and Catholic priests, we cherish our bond with our people and the nation of Vietnam despite the current geographical distances. We have prayed for the day our people see true freedom and a prosperous country, in which all citizens are loved and respected as human beings with full dignities.

In the realm of religion, we firmly believe that true religious freedom is a fundamental and sacred need of each person and society. To the future of Vietnam, religious freedom is not only a just demand but also a human right issue that needs urgent solution. The nation of Vietnam will miss its opportunity for a bright future if her people are denied true religious freedom. The history of Vietnam has proved that religions are inseparable from the fate of the country. Only when religions are free could society be peaceful and healthy and the nation's humanistic development be ensured.

Unfortunately for the people of Vietnam today, recent events have shown more and more clearly that religions are being turned into apparatus of the Vietnamese communist authorities and thus facing the danger of collapsing on their own. To implement this strategy, [the authorities resort to] the tightly choking laws, a system of “begging and granting” favors and privileges, an arbitrary administrative structure, the policy of “divide and conquer” to generate divisiveness among the leadership of all religions, etc. All of these measures aim for the goal of stripping religions of their sacred values and eventually rendering them meaningless and useless. Religious freedom is being distorted and brazenly trampled upon by the Vietnamese communist authorities. The current unstable condition of society serve as fertile ground for corruption and abuses of power at every level of government. In the face of these tremendous social problems, religions in Vietnam could not raise their voices except for toeing the lines of the authorities.

With respect to the Catholic Church of Vietnam, we strongly support the liturgical direction of the Bishops Council of Vietnam through its May 01, 1980 Joint-Letter “Living the Good News among Compatriots”. For this very wish to live the Good News among compatriots we can no longer be silent on the grave concerns of our compatriots as presented above.

With such knowledge of the situation, following are the stance of the undersigned overseas Vietnamese priests on the urgent issues pertaining the conditions of religions in Vietnam:

1. We wholeheartedly support Father Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly’s devotion and just demand for true religious freedom. We also support the just demands for religious freedom of the leaders of other religions. We demand the Vietnamese communist authorities respect the personal safety and the right to carry out religious functions of these religious leaders.
2. We demand the Vietnamese communist authorities, for the sake of the future of the people and nation of Vietnam, end all forms of religious oppression and cease the evil policy of turning religions into their instruments and eventually exterminating all religions in Vietnam.
3. We call on all freedom-loving governments and international human rights organizations to help defend the human values and rights being trampled upon in Vietnam, especially the religious freedom as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Announced in Washington D.C. on the Solemn Commemoration of Mary Ascension, August 15, 2001.

(Signed by 142 overseas Vietnamese Catholic priests) □

LETTER OF PROTEST **from Archbishop of Sydney**

His Excellency Ambassador Mr. Vu Chi Cong
Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Your Excellency,

The arrest of Fr. Nguyen Van Ly of Phu An by Vietnamese police on May 17th this year has recently been brought to my attention.

On behalf of the Catholic community in Australia, I formally protest Fr. Ly’s arrest and the long campaign of persecution and harassment that he and others working for religious freedom in Vietnam have suffered at the hands of the authorities.

I ask you to convey this protest to the government of Vietnam. I request that Fr. Ly be immediately released from prison.

I will be providing the Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs with a copy of this letter, and intend to do all that I can to assist Fr. Ly’s cause in this country and with overseas agencies.

I would be very pleased to receive your response to these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

GEORGE PELL / ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY □

LETTER OF APPRECIATION **from Father Ly's Colleagues**

(Excerpts)

Dear Archbishop Pell:

...Speaking for Fr. Ly, we would like to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your letter, dated July 18th, 2001, to the Vietnamese Communist authorities.

... We are deeply touched especially because, as far as we know, you are the first Catholic bishop in the world to voice his support for Father Ly and his friends in this struggle.

... Your action brings great comfort to Fr. Ly and all of us (the parishioners of Nguyet Bieu and An Truyen and both of us).

... We respectfully request your continued support for people who are bravely standing up for freedom in this country — freedom to be [true] human-beings, freedom to be children of Jesus, children of Buddha.

Respectfully yours,

Rev. Peter Nguyen Huu Giai

Rev. Peter Phan Van Loi □

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR Human Rights in Vietnam

AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW ON Human Rights Condition in Vietnam

Opening Remark of Dr Ian Spry on the Launch of the Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Committee (Victoria) at Queen's Hall, Parliament House of Victoria on 22nd August 2001.

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The Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Committee is not a mere minor group. In fact it represents broadly the entire Vietnamese community. For example, already more than 10,000 signatures have been collected for a Petition to the Senate on human rights, and many more are to be added.

As we are going to hear tonight, the human rights position in Vietnam is disgraceful. There is no freedom of expression. Persons espousing unacceptable views find themselves arrested immediately and imprisoned for punishment and indoctrination, for long periods.

The persecution of religious groups is only an example. These are especially significant groups because they are critical to society, and also they can be easily monitored. If a priest or monk is imprisoned, this is known about. But countless other more anonymous Vietnamese are being incarcerated without the rest of the world being informed.

What can we do? Unfortunately Australia's response has not been adequate. The efforts of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in particular are derisory. One is left with the impression that its officers do not care sufficiently. We are told that protests are made and that there are "useful" discussions, but to large extent these are merely an excuse for a lack of fortitude.

Likewise, there are concerns at the absence of firmness of the Commonwealth Government. Its criticisms of abuses of human rights are only taken to a certain level, and thereafter there is a disinclination to be more resolute, a kind of moral cowardice.

One of the first things to be done now is for the Australian Parliament to follow the lead of the European Parliament. Last month the European Parliament formally called for the release of all prisoners of conscience, for an end to religious persecution, for the Ambassadors of the member States to investigate these matters and for a Delegation to visit Vietnam to meet religious leaders of all confessions, and especially those who have been imprisoned.

In carefully measured terms the European Parliament also

called upon Vietnam to guarantee to all Vietnamese both freedom of religion and freedom of assembly.

Australia has so far been remarkable remiss. The Australian Government and Australian diplomats ought to have been organising regular visits to prisoners of conscience to monitor their conditions. Such international intervention offers a measure of protection. Totalitarian governments such as Vietnam are deterred when they know that acts of oppression are being monitored and publicised around the world. Even more important is the question of overseas aid. Australia regularly provides many millions of dollars in voluntary aid to Vietnam. There is every reason why in future all such aid should be subject to strict conditions in regard to human rights. In the absence of a radical improvement, there must be an immediate and effective deterrent. In other words, in the absence of a radical improvement, aid should be withheld totally. As noted, any improvement must be radical. Totalitarian governments lie systematically, and Vietnam is a striking example of false propaganda. If one believed the official statements of the Vietnamese government one would be lulled into regarding Vietnam as a most enlightened democracy, rather than the regressive regime that it is. Apart from anything else, why should Australian taxpayers make continuous large donations to repressive regimes? Official words of complaint or criticisms by other governments are one thing. They are necessary, and they make an impact. But their effect may be slow or even marginal. One thing that all totalitarian regimes understand however is the withholding of money, the withholding of financial aid. The withholding of financial aid is by far the most effective weapon of all. What is the minimum on which one should insist? Quite simply, the total removal of all restraints on freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Neither on principle nor for practical reasons is there any scope for compromise or delay.

The Vietnamese community expects that until there is complete freedom of expression and religion, all financial aid to Vietnam must stop.

Ian Spry, QC.*

Dr Ian Charles Fowell Spry, Doctor of Laws, has been a Queen's Counsel for more than twenty years and is a former Member of the Law Faculties of Melbourne University and Monash University. He is the Editor of the National Observer, Australia's leading current affairs quarterly. He has a strong interest in social justice and human rights, and has been the driving force in the establishment of the Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Committee (Victoria). Dr Ian Spry, QC is the Inaugural President of AVHRC (Victoria).

□

Persecuted Writers Honored with Prestigious Awards

27 Writers from 20 Countries Receive Hellman/Hammett Grants

A diverse group of writers from 20 countries have received Hellman/Hammett grants in recognition of the courage with which they faced political persecution, Human Rights Watch announced today.

Among the recipients is Daniel Bekoutou whose reports played a key role in the international effort to hold Chadian dictator Hissène Habré accountable for crimes against humanity committed under his rule. The Hellman/Hammett awards also recognize Maria Petreu for her outspoken criticism of extreme right ideology in Romania and Esmat Qaney whose writings have been burned and banned by successive Afghan regimes.

Each year, Human Rights Watch presents Hellman/Hammett grants to writers around the world who have been targets of political persecution. The grant program began in 1989 when the estates of American authors Lillian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett asked Human Rights Watch to design a program for writers in financial need as a result of expressing their views. This year's grants totaled \$175,000.

In many countries, governments use military and presidential decrees, criminal libel, and sedition laws to silence critics. Writers and journalists are threatened, harassed, assaulted, or jailed merely for providing information from nongovernmental sources. In addition to those who are directly targeted, many others are forced to practice self-censorship.

Short biographies of the recipients who received grants in 2001 follow.

....

Aung Pwint (Burma), a poet whose work expresses the feelings of ordinary people about the social and economic crisis in their country, was arrested in 1967 and again in 1978 because of his contacts with the student movement. During the 1988 pro-democracy movement, he acted as joint secretary of the People's Peaceful Demonstration Committee in the Delta region. Subsequently, he joined a fledgling media group, which produced videos and calendars. In 1996, the military government banned his videos because they were considered to show too negative a picture of Burmese society and living standards. In 1999, he was arrested and sentenced to eight years in prison.

Bei Ling (China), poet and essayist, came to the United States in 1988 on an exchange with a Chinese-language newspaper. After the Tiananmen Square protest, he stayed and founded *Tendency Quarterly*, a scholarly literary magazine. Since 1998, he has spent most of his time in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan researching, writing and editing. In 2000, he rented an apartment and opened editorial offices in Beijing. After printing the summer issue of *Tendency*, he was detained and charged with "illegal publication." Beijing security forces interrogated him and threatened a ten-year prison term. They offered leniency if he provided information about the identity of Chinese citizens who had helped to produce *Tendency*. He refused. After an international protest, he was fined \$24,000 and released.

Bui Ngoc Tan (Vietnam) started a career in journalism in 1954 writing in accord with the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) line. Gradually, he became critical of the VCP perspective. In 1968, he was arrested as a "revisionist and antiparty element" and imprisoned without trial from 1968 to 1973. After his release, he wrote stories and novels but was banned from publishing and had to earn his living as a laborer. In 1995, he was permitted to publish again. *Nhung Nguoi Ranh Viec* (These People with Nothing to Do), published in 1995, and *Mot Ngay Dai Dang Dang* (A Very Long and Boring Day), published in 1999, are mildly critical of the ruling regime. In 2000, he published *Chuyen Ke Nam 2000* (Story Told in Year 2000), a denunciation of the communist detention policy. This book was too much for the censors; it was recalled and burned. He has undergone numerous interrogations and is now under surveillance.

Chan Mony (Cambodia), journalist, has written mostly on social issues and public safety - law enforcement, robberies, mob violence, and street demonstrations. He currently works for the *Evening News*, a paper generally regarded as leaning toward the ruling Cambodian People's Party. In March 1997, while covering a peaceful demonstration in front of the National Assembly, someone threw grenades into the crowd killing at least sixteen people and injuring hundreds of others. Mony's right leg was broken, and shrapnel pierced his left eye. Members of a bodyguard unit of Prime Minister Hun Sen were implicated in the attack, but no one has ever been arrested. Mony's eye injury flared up again, putting him in constant pain.

Kong Bun Chhoeun (Cambodia), novelist and songwriter, has been writing prolifically since the 1950s but stopped and became a farmer while the Khmer Rouge were in power. If he had revealed his identity during their regime, it is likely he would have been killed. Cambodia is now moving toward democracy, but powerful people continue to ignore the law. The plot of his last book, *The Destiny of Marina, or Acid-Laced Vengeance*, published in 2000, bore many similarities to the 1999 scandal of a karaoke singer who was attacked with acid by the jealous wife of a government official. The book details the problem of official impunity in Cambodia. After publication, Kong Bun Chhoeun received death threats from the husband of the woman who had mutilated the singer. In November 2000, he fled to Thailand.

Pham Que Duong (Vietnam) started his career in the People's Liberation Army in 1945 at age fourteen. Over the next forty years, he rose to the rank of colonel. In 1982, he became editor in chief of *Tap Chi Lich Su Quan Su* (Military History Review) and devoted all of his time to writing. In 1986, he was fired because he refused to obey orders not to mention exploits of dismissed officers. In 1990, he was investigated and accused of supporting Tran Xuan Bach, Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party for the seventh Congress, who was expelled for advocating pluralism. In 1990, Pham Que Duong quit the VCP in solidarity with a prominent outspoken dissident and became a democracy activist. His house has been searched several times, his telephone tapped, his e-mail suppressed, and he is often summoned to police headquarters for questioning.

San San Nweh (Burma), novelist and poet, has spent long periods in prison for her political activities. She has been serving her current ten-year sentence since October 1994 for "fomenting trouble" by producing anti-government reports and sending them to foreign journalists. She has been offered freedom if she will renounce all political activity, but she has regularly refused despite being forced to sit cross-legged in a cramped cell with three other political convicts and barred from speaking for more than fifteen minutes a day. She is plagued with poor health - kidney infections, high blood pressure, and eye problems.

Wang Yiliang (China), poet and essayist, has been involved in underground literary activity since the early 1980s. State Security authorities have kept him under close surveillance, have regularly summoned him for interrogation and detention, and banned publication of his work. In January 2000, Wang Yiliang was arrested for "disrupting social order" and sentenced to two years of "reeducation through labor." □

Crackdown on Highland Minorities Continues

53rd SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS SUB-COMMISSION
ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS
(30 JULY-17 AUGUST 2001)

STATEMENT OF
THE TRANSNATIONAL RADICAL PARTY
(NGO WITH GENERAL CONSULTATIVE STA-
TUS TO THE UN)
Statement made on 8 August 2001 by **Mr. Kok Ksor**

-o0o-

My name is Kok Ksor and I speak on behalf of the Transnational Radical Party on the indigenous Montagnards inside Vietnam's Central Highlands.

In February 2001, thousands of Christian Montagnards of Vietnam's central highlands - or Degar people as we call ourselves - peacefully demonstrated, demanding that the Vietnamese Communist government respect the human rights of our people. The Vietnamese Government responded by sending thousands of armed troops including tanks and helicopter gunships into our homelands beginning a military crackdown against our race.

Our peaceful demonstrations were calling for an end to the last 26 years of religious persecution, human rights violations and confiscation of our ancestral lands by the Vietnamese communist government.

In the wake of this military crackdown security forces arrested, intimidated, beat and tortured with electric prods hundreds of our people. In the last few months the Government of Vietnam has:

- executed some of our people.
- burned down some of our Christian Churches.
- sent thousands of soldiers into our villages, preventing us from attending to our crops in an effort to punish our people.
- offered bounties for the capture of our people who have fled from the central highland repression into Cambodia.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Refugees International and US Congressional Resolution 178 have all reported that the Vietnamese authorities offered bounties to Cambodian authorities

for the capture and return of our people who fled the military crackdown. Many of our villages are still under house arrest and refugees are actually being hunted down. Those of our people who were forcibly returned to Vietnam from Cambodia have been imprisoned, tortured and publicly beaten by Vietnamese security forces.

Now the central highlands - our ancestral lands - remains cordoned off by regiments of soldiers to prevent our people from escaping to Cambodia. The fate of hundreds of our people in refugee camps in Cambodia currently remains in doubt as Vietnam demands their return and rejects UN proposals for their safe return.

This current brutality against our race however, is not new to us. After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 the Communist Vietnamese government began a brutal revenge against our race because of the Vietnam War - as over 40, 000 thousand of our people were recruited by the US Government. We served as loyal allies to America and over one quarter of our population, men women and children - 200,000 people - would die in the Vietnam War. In 1975 the communist authorities immediately treated our race as enemies and executed and imprisoned our people and began to forcibly assimilate our race.

This revenge never ended and the Vietnamese Government continues today by persecuting us and exploiting our ancestral homelands in much the same way indigenous people all over the world have suffered. The Vietnamese government has:

- confiscated our lands and natural resources.
- forcibly relocated most of our villages to inferior lands to make way for coffee plantations, logging operations and transmigration policies that permits thousands of immigrants from other parts of Vietnam to settle on our ancestral homelands.
- arrested, imprisoned and tortured our people for practising Christianity.
- arrested, imprisoned and tortured our people who are human rights defenders.
- executed some our people in the last few months and many have disappeared.
- They have forced our people to live on poor agricultural land without adequate water resources while our people starve and children suffer malnutrition.
- They have condemned us to poverty by the current policy of fixed field - fixed residence.
- They have forced assimilation upon us and restricted us from access to education, health services and employment.
- They have coerced, forced, bribed or fined

thousands of our women into being sterilized while abusing aid monies from the UNDP and World Bank allocated for these family planning programs.

All these human rights violations are documented by numerous independent news sources and various NGOs. The US government has already called for independent monitors to be granted access to the region. The scale of the persecution is evident from the hundreds of my people who have fled to Cambodia and from the present involvement of the UNHCR. The US Commission for International Religious Freedom and European Parliament recently condemned the Vietnamese government's policies of religious persecution. In a recent report the International Commission of Jurists - Australian Branch -concluded that the Vietnamese government has systematically persecuted the Montagnard race since 1975.

These human rights abuses by the Vietnamese government violate virtually every norm of customary international law as well as the covenants and the instruments of international law that Vietnam has agreed to comply with.

In 1975 the Vietnamese government publicly executed my Uncle who was a Montagnard Senator. This year in May 2001 the Vietnamese security forces arrested and tortured my Mother who is in her eighties. They threatened to kill her over and over and broke three of her ribs. She spent three days in hospital and is still under house arrest.

Mr. Chairman on behalf of the Transnational Radical Party, I ask that the United Nations and the international community:

- take emergency action to intervene, investigate and monitor the military crackdown in the Central Highlands.
- take emergency action to safeguard our refugees in Cambodia under international guidelines and ensure the bounty schemes by Vietnamese authorities are immediately stopped.
- to urgently investigate, monitor and address the underlying problems facing our people; namely the confiscations of our ancestral lands, religious persecution, abuse of sterilization policies and systematic human rights violations enacted by the Vietnamese government.
- to make aid to Vietnam contingent on the Vietnamese government complying with international human rights law and for the United Nations to urge other nations who extend trade benefits or give financial aid to Vietnam to do the same.

□

VOICE OF THE MASSES

Following is the translation of a letter sent by Ven. Thich Phuoc Vien to the leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party and its government to protest the harassment of Buddhist clergies in Hue after their attempt to visit the detained Patriarch of the Church on July 6, 2001. The letter also protests the pattern of actions taken by the Communist Government to weaken and use the Buddhist Church for its political purposes.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Independence - Freedom - Happiness

PETITION

Respectfully sent to:

- Mr. Nong Duc Manh, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam
- Mr. Phan Van Khai, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Also respectfully sent to:

- Mr. Ho Xuan Man, Party Secretary of Thua Thien province
- Mr. Nguyen Van Me, Chairman of the People's Committee of Thua Thien province

Dear Gentlemen,

I, undersigned as clergy citizen Le Hien a.k.a. Thich Phuoc Vien, had lived through 15 years of incarceration in prison camps Binh Dien in Thua Thien province, Xuan Phuoc in Phu Khanh, and Ba Sao in Ha Nam Ninh until my release in September 1995. I currently reside at the Chau Lam pagoda in Duong Xuan Thuong II village, Thuy Xuan ward, Hue city. I wish to respectfully present you with the following matter:

June 7, 2001 was the day Venerable Thich Quang Do, Head of the Hoa Dao Institute of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), chose for all clergies and lay-Buddhists to visit Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, the 83- year old Interim Head of the Tang Thong Institute of

the UBCV currently in poor health and kept under solitary detainment at an isolated pagoda in Nghia Hanh district of Quang Ngai province. However, even before that date arrived, the clergies in Thua Thien and Hue, including myself, and a large number of members of the Buddhist Family were visited by the Public Security cadres and then summoned to the Ward People's Committee for further questioning. The only purpose of these sessions was preemptive intimidation. However, out of our respect for our teachers and the Church, we simply could not turn down the trip. After that pivotal day of July 06, many more Buddhist clergies were summoned for questioning. On the 13th and 14th of July, it was my turn to report to the People's Committee Office of Thuy Xuan ward to answer for my involvement [with this trip]. Again, more condemnation and intimidation.

The pattern of these actions [by the authorities] in the last 20 years have generated a chain of problems with the Buddhist Church, and caused all the Buddhists loyal to the Church tremendous pain, bitterness, and anger. I have raised this point at the "working" sessions. My interrogators and accusers, however, said [such matter] did not lie within their responsibilities. After a while, they suggested I write the issues down on paper so they would convey to higher authorities for answers or solutions. That is the reason for this petition.

Dear Gentlemen,

As a clergy citizen, I always take interest in religious issues, especially those involving Buddhism. As such, I have outlined below the issues pertaining only to the Buddhist faith.

The Reality of the Buddhist Faith in Vietnam:

1. It is well known that there currently exists no true Buddhist church in Vietnam. This is because the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), founded by the people and handed down from generation to generation, has been banned whereas the Buddhist Church of Vietnam (BCV), erected by the government and being a member of the Fatherland Front, is a political organization, not a religious one. This BCV is led by the Communist Party of Vietnam as stated in Article 9 of the 1992 Constitution: "The Vietnamese Fatherland Front and its member organizations are the political foundation of the People's Government ... " Moreover, since various current publications of the Government have stated many times that the nature of Buddhism contradicts the scientific Socialism (see the letter of Venerable Thich Quang Do), it is clear that the Communist Party embraces religions for only one purpose; That is to use religions to appeal to the masses and to protect the Party

just like [the Party's Secretary General] Nguyen Van Linh openly declared in 1980. The ultimate goal is to mutate and eventually eliminate Buddhism [from Vietnam]. There has been no intention to allow this faith to expand.

2. In practice, ever since 1975, the Government has used every means of terrorization possible to break clergies and lay-Buddhists into agents for the Communist Party — as listed in the letters of protest from the Tang Thong Institute and Hoa Dao Institute of the UBCV and witnessed in Thua Thien and Hue recently. The Government has placed its “fake monks” in the ranks of the clergies to degrade their qualities, upset religious lives in the pagodas, and discredit the clergies in the eyes of the Buddhist followers and the general population at large.
3. The government has used the media outlets ostentatiously belonging to the Buddhist Church to spread the Communist Party's policies on internal and foreign issues. The Party's propaganda are largely wrong and negatively influence the views of the Buddhist followers. For example, the Government used the Giac Ngo (Enlightenment) Newspaper to spread its propaganda: opposing NATO and supporting Milosevic. These incidents mark a shameful period in the history of Buddhism in Vietnam. The pure teachings of Buddha is now twisted to serve immediate and short-sighted political aims.
4. The policy of taking advantage of religions for short-term gains did bring some results benefiting the Communist Party. For the long run, however, this policy is counterproductive and the Communist Party of Vietnam shall bear the unimaginable consequences of its shortsightedness.

Dear Gentlemen,

Having raised the above issues, I would like to make the following suggestions:

1. Let the Buddhist Church operates freely according to the wishes of the Vietnamese Buddhists and not to the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, which themselves contradict the Vietnamese tradition and culture as evidenced by the 50 years of building socialism in Vietnam. Should the Communist Party wish to create a Buddhist organization of its own, that is within its right; however, it should not and must not turn all Buddhist organizations into Party's organs.
2. Do not force clergies to engage in political activities such as being members of the National Assembly, local representatives, etc. [The clergies are not to] compete

for secular power. Such activities simply cause conflicts and degrade the religious lives of these devoted souls.

3. Do not utilize Buddhist cultural, educational, and media facilities to serve political purposes and thus, distort the true meaning of Buddhist teachings.

Dear Gentlemen,

The strength of Buddhism lies in the spiritual and cultural realms and not in politics. Taking advantage of Buddhism and using it as political tools will bring only temporary advances. However, if and when such abuse is serious enough to totally change the characteristics of Buddhism, it will become a very dangerous secular power. Of course it will crumble and pull down with it all powers that have clung to it to exist. The Communist Party of Vietnam should heed this warning carefully. It should not be blinded by a few near-term successes and ignore the future disasters to fall on the communists themselves.

Best Regards,

Chau Lam Pagoda, Hue, 26/07/2001
(Signed)

Hien Le, a.k.a. Thich Phuoc Vien

Copies to be respectfully sent to:

1. Patriarch Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, Interim Head of the Tang Thong Institute of the UBCV
2. Venerable Thich Quang Do, Head of the Hoa Dao Institute of the UBCV
3. League of Clergies of Thua Thien & Hue

** Translation Notes: The Vietnamese Communist authorities ambiguously call all forms of interrogative activities, from questioning to torturing, as “lam viec” (working) sessions. □

**RADIO BROADCASTS TO VIETNAM
RUN BY FREE VIETNAMESE:**

1. New Horizon (Chân Trời Mới):
8:30 - 9:30 pm Vietnam time on 15750 khz

2. Radio Free Asia (Á Châu Tự 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