

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We, representatives of concerned multi-faith organizations and individuals, write to urge your Department to publicly and privately call on the Vietnamese government to:

- Allow all independent religious organizations to freely conduct religious activities and independently govern themselves. Churches and denominations that do not choose to join one of the officially authorized religious organizations with government-sanctioned boards should be allowed to operate independently.
- End harassment, arrests, persecution, imprisonment, and ill treatment of followers of independent religions, and release those detained for peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of religion, belief, expression, assembly, and association.
- Ensure that all domestic legislation addressing religious affairs is brought into conformity with international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); amend provisions in domestic law that impinge on freedom of religion and belief, expression, association, or peaceful assembly in violation of the ICCPR.

Vietnam prescribes a multistage process for a religious organization to receive recognition. Under a new law, an independent religious organization must obtain a certificate of registration for religious activities from the provincial-level Committee of Religious Affairs. The new law prohibits sowing division among “the national great unity, harm state defense, national security, public order, and social morale.” This “national unity” catchphrase has been the basis for the suppression and harassment of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and many other independent religions.

In this new law, under article 32, candidates for religious appointments must “have the spirit of national unity and harmony” while under article 37 religious education must include “Vietnamese history and Vietnamese law” as core subjects.

Without freedom of religion for those religions independent from the government, there is no true freedom of religion. Systematic, ongoing, egregious suppression of religious freedom warrants the designation of a country of particular concern. Therefore, we support USCIRF’s call to place Vietnam back on the CPC list under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998.

Sincerely,

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UNIFIED BUDDHIST CHURCH OF VIETNAM  
INTERFAITH COUNCIL OF VIETNAM  
CHURCH OF PROTESTANT LUTHERAN COMMUNITY OF VIETNAM  
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