
amnesty international

£SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

@Recent arrests of Buddhists

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Twenty-three monks and lay Buddhists have been arrested since the end of October 1994 by the Vietnamese authorities and several others have been called in for questioning on more than one occasion. These arrests and the events leading to them, as described below, show the continuing repression of Buddhists in Viet Nam and are in flagrant contradiction to the Vietnamese Government's assertion of freedom of religion. Amnesty International believes that two of those arrested are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and religion, and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. Amnesty International believes that the others arrested are probably prisoners of conscience, but is not yet able to make an accurate assessment because of lack of information. It believes that the Vietnamese Government should undertake an independent review of their cases and release them immediately if they are found to be held solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and religion.

The first arrest was made on 29 October when **Thich Long Tri**, Abbot of Vien Giac Temple, Hoi An arrived in Ho Chi Minh City in order to head a relief mission for the victims of floods in the Mekong Delta where over 400 people died and thousands of others were made homeless. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), a religious organization banned in 1981, organized a relief convoy which was to depart from Ho Chi Minh City on 5 November, but the authorities deemed the relief mission to be "subversive" and detrimental to "religion and national solidarity". Thich Long Tri was held for a day before being expelled from Ho Chi Minh City and is now in detention.

On 5 November, leaders of the mission were allegedly warned to call off the operation: 60 monks and nuns and over 300 lay Buddhists were prevented from carrying out the relief mission and the following day three monks and two civilians were arrested. **Thich Nhat Ban**, **Thich Khong Tanh** (Abbot of Lien Tri Temple, Ho Chi Minh City), **Thich Tri Luc** (Thien Mu Pagoda, Hué), **Pham Van Xua** (Buddhist name: Nhat Thuong) and **Mrs Nguyen Thi Em** (Dong Ngoc) are held in Ho Chi Minh City and are not allowed to have visits from their families. It is

also reported that the monks are not allowed to wear their monastic robes. To Amnesty International's knowledge, they still have not been charged with any specific offence. Although the government denied these five arrests, the Committee of the Fatherland's Front in Ho Chi Minh City declared on 10 November that the authorities had "smashed this plan", referring to the UBCV relief operation.

Both Thich Khong Tanh and Thich Tri Luc have previously been arrested and adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International: Thich Khong Tanh was detained from October 1992 until October 1993 for protesting against the treatment of Buddhists and calling for the respect of religious freedom. Thich Tri Luc had spent over two months in detention in 1992 on the same charge. Both were also accused of leaving their pagodas without a travel permit. In addition, Thich Khong Tanh spent nine years in detention between 1976 and 1985 for protesting against the order to register young monks for military service.

On 10 November the police raided Tu Hieu Temple in Ho Chi Minh City and confiscated all relief goods: the Abbott and treasurer of the relief mission, **Thich Nguyen Ly**, was arrested. He had been under police surveillance prior to his arrest and had been summoned by the police on several occasions.

It is also feared that a number of other civilians connected with the relief mission remain under investigation and that further arrests could occur.

Amnesty International wrote to the Vietnamese Government in November 1994 to express its concern about these arrests and to request further information but, as of February 1995, has received no response.

This wave of arrests culminated in the detention of the two leaders of the UBCV. **Thich Huyen Quang** (secular name Le Dinh Nhan), Supreme Patriarch of the UBCV, was arrested on 29 December after starting a hunger strike to protest the arrests and harassment of members of the UBCV; **Thich Quang Do** (secular name Dang Phuc Tue), Secretary General of the UBCV, was taken into detention on 4 January after a search of his temple, Thanh Minh Pagoda, in Ho Chi Minh City. The Vietnamese Government first denied both arrests: however, a statement released by the Foreign Ministry on 25 January said that Thich Quang Do would stand trial for "provoking trouble contrary to Vietnamese law" and that he would be tried as "a Vietnamese delinquent and not as a Buddhist". The statement referred to Thich Huyen Quang's arrest as a simple transfer to another temple "because he often disturbed the other monks at his pagoda and local people" who had then requested his transfer. He is now under house-arrest in Quang Phuoc pagoda, Nghia Hanh district, Quang Ngai province.

Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do are vocal critics of the government's policy on religion and have been under house-arrest since 1982. Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience.

In response to international protests about these arrests, including a resolution by the European Parliament in January 1995, the Vietnamese Government stated that they had "no reason to carry out a policy of discrimination against Buddhists" and accused the monks of "plot[ting] provocative activities that undermine national unity and the people's authority" and of colluding with "reactionary overseas Vietnamese". The government consistently refers to members and supporters of the UBCV as politically-motivated trouble-makers who disrupt public order or aim to overthrow the government.

Discontent among Buddhists is not restricted to outlawed organizations but is also mounting among members of the officially approved Vietnam Buddhist Church (VBC). Disturbances erupted in Hué on 27 November 1994 when several monks and students disrupted the opening ceremony of the Buddhist Elementary School held at Bao Quoc Pagoda. The protestors claimed that they had come peacefully to hand in a petition protesting at the political content of the school's curriculum and the discriminatory enrolment criteria. Several people were injured in the ensuing confrontation and the police soon announced they would be filing charges against those involved under Article 198 of the Criminal Code. Article 198 provides for up to seven years' imprisonment for the "crime of disrupting public order". Two monks involved in the incident, **Thich Thai Hung** and **Thich Hanh Duc**, were arrested in December.

In a related incident, **Thich Nhu Dat**, member of the Thua Thien - Hué VBC Executive Board, and **12 novices** were called for "working sessions" at Security Police Headquarters on 7 December and are still detained today. In an eight-page letter Thich Nhu Dat had complained about the enrolment policy of the school and the "civic studies" to be taught together with Buddhist scriptures. Complaints such as these reflect the general discontent over the strict control that the authorities exert over religious practice, whether Buddhist or Christian. According to guidelines published by the Government in December 1993, religious bodies have to inform the authorities about the enrolment or ordination of clergy. "The principal criteria for the choice of the candidates is their good performance of their civic duties. The course of civic education must be integrated into the programs of the schools ... and considered as a major subject" (No500HD/TGCP, 4 December 1993). Strict rules also control the publication of religious texts.

Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are guaranteed by Articles 69 and 70 of the 1992 Constitution. Despite these guarantees the Vietnamese Government continues to arrest and detain monks and lay Buddhists solely for peacefully exercising their rights. To Amnesty International's knowledge there are currently at least 36 Buddhists in detention, including the 23 described above. Some monks have been detained since the late 1970s and early 1980s. Amnesty International calls on the Vietnamese Government to respect the right of all its citizens to practice the religion of their choice as enshrined in its Constitution and in international law.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

1. Please send letters and telegrams:

- ◆ expressing concern at recent arrests and lack of freedom of religion despite safeguards in the 1992 Constitution;
- ◆ calling on the authorities to release immediately and unconditionally Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do;
- ◆ urging the government to undertake a review of these recent arrests and to release all those imprisoned if they are found to be held solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and religion;
- ◆ urging the government to ensure that all those arrested are detained in accordance with international standards and are allowed access to a doctor, lawyer and family members.

APPEALS:

Mr Nguyen Dinh Loc, Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice
25 Cat Linh
Ha Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Mr Bui Thien Ngo, Minister of the Interior

Ministry of the Interior
1 Tran Binh Trong
Ha Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

COPIES:

Mr Vu Quang, Chairman

Commission for Religious Affairs
National Assembly (Quoc Hoi)
35 Ngo Quyen
Ha Noi
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- and to diplomatic representatives of Viet Nam in your country

2. LOCAL PUBLICITY:

Please try to obtain local publicity about these cases.

KEYWORDS: RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS - BUDDHIST1 / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE / RELIEF WORKERS / REARREST
/ HOUSE/TOWN ARREST / RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE /

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