

## August 25, 2008: Vietnam Policy Focus: New USCIRF Report Details Ongoing Arrests, Harassment, and Repression of Religious Freedom

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Contact: Judith Ingram,

Communications  
Director,

(202) 523-3240, ext. 127

[communications@uscirf.gov](mailto:communications@uscirf.gov)

### WASHINGTON

- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom issued its Vietnam Policy Focus today. The report, which includes findings from the Commission's 2007 trip to Vietnam, highlights government-sponsored harassment, detention, and imprisonment faced by individuals and leaders of diverse religious communities. In light of these severe and widespread violations of religious freedom, the Commission calls on the U.S. State Department to re-designate Vietnam a "country of particular concern" (CPC), under the terms of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. The CPC designation is reserved, under law, for nations that engage in severe violations of religious freedom.

"The U.S. government still needs to press Vietnam's leaders to make immediate improvements to end religious freedom abuses, ease restrictions, and release prisoners," said Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer.

The Commission has found that religious freedom conditions in Vietnam continue to be mixed, with improvements for some religious communities but not for others; progress in some provinces but not in others; reforms of laws at the national level that are not fully implemented or are

ignored at the local level; and still too many abuses of and restrictions on religious freedom affecting most of Vietnam's diverse religious communities. Some important changes were implemented and prisoners were released after the U.S. government designated Vietnam a CPC. However, in view of the uneven pace of reforms and the continued detention of religious prisoners of concern, The Commission again recommends that Vietnam be designated a CPC.

The Commission has identified numerous prisoners of concern and restrictive, abusive practices of the Vietnamese government. During its 2007 trip to Vietnam, the Commission met with religious freedom activists Nguyen Van Dai and Li Thi Cong Nhan at Cau Dien Prison in Hanoi. In March 2007, Dai and Nhan were among the first arrested and sentenced to long-term detention as part of a larger crackdown on democracy, free speech, and human rights advocates. Their cases are among those highlighted in the Vietnam Policy Focus.

Activities of ethnic minority religious groups, such as the Montagnard and Hmong Protestants, are often vigorously restricted by the Vietnamese government. Long-term administrative detainees from the Catholic Church and the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam, including Thich Quang Do and Fr. Phan Van Loi, and numerous religious "prisoners of concern" from the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Khmer Buddhist communities remain in custody in retaliation for their advocacy of religious freedom. The Commission has consistently called for the release of all prisoners of conscience in Vietnam.

"Improved conditions for some only emphasize the inexcusability of ongoing abuses endured by others," notes Gaer. "The State Department should not diminish its categorization of Vietnam as a severe violator until the Vietnamese government demonstrates a countrywide, non-discriminatory commitment to religious freedom and human rights for all."

The Vietnam Policy Focus is available at:  
<http://www.uscirf.gov/images/PolicyFocusPublications/vietnam%20policy%20focus%20-%20summer%202008.pdf>