

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Vietnam assumes the presidency of the UN Security Council today. One week before taking this prominent leadership position, Vietnam completely rejected recommendations to improve its human rights record raised during the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has long been concerned about deteriorating human rights conditions in Vietnam, particularly for religious communities; free speech, democracy, and labor activists; and human rights lawyers. USCIRF urges the Obama Administration to use all available diplomatic tools to address these issues more effectively at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Recently, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael Michalak stated again that while he remains troubled by the overall human rights problems in Vietnam, he believes that religious freedom conditions have improved. A USCIRF delegation traveled to Vietnam in May 2009 to assess conditions on the ground and determine whether to continue to recommend Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC).

"We have to disagree with the U.S. Ambassador's assessment, because we found sufficient evidence to conclude that religious freedom conditions have not improved since Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and have deteriorated for some religious groups and the human rights lawyers who try to protect them," said Michael Cromartie, USCIRF vice-chair. "The Administration must raise the profile of religious freedom and related human rights beyond the scope of private diplomacy by designating Vietnam as a CPC and signaling its support for passing the Vietnam Human Rights Act in Congress. Prosperity is not our only interest in Vietnam--U.S. policy must stand firmly on the side of those in Vietnam who want greater freedoms and guaranteed rights."

In testimony before the Tom Lantos Congressional Human Rights Commission, commissioner Cromartie cited continued detention of religious prisoners; severe restrictions on independent religious activity; and an active and coordinated policy to suppress the growth of certain Buddhist, Hoa Hao, and Protestant groups as evidence that Vietnam should be designated as a CPC. A copy of USCIRF's full testimony can be found at [www.uscifr.gov](http://www.uscifr.gov).

Since USCIRF returned from Vietnam, there continue to be reports of detentions of religious leaders in the Central Highlands, a police raid on an independent Protestant church, violence used to disrupt peaceful Catholic prayer vigils at disputed properties, and social and police violence targeting the Plum Village monastery affiliated with Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. In addition, lawyer Le Cong Dinh was arrested in part for his human rights work and religious freedom activists Fr. Nguyen Van Ly, Nguyen Van Dai, Le Thi Cong Nhan, and Thich Quang Do remain held in some form of detention. USCIRF continues to work with the Vietnamese

government to assess and address reported abuses.

“Time has run out on excuses and the evidence is clear--the Administration should act quickly to promote long-term U.S. interests by designating Vietnam as a CPC,” said Mr. Cromartie. “When used in the past, the CPC designation produced tangible improvements and did not hinder progress on other bilateral issues. It can be used now with similar results. When he was a senator, President Obama worked closely with USCIRF to raise religious freedom issues in Vietnam. We urge him to do so again, because targeted action can bring about positive change.”

For a copy of then-Senator Obama’s letter on religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam, please contact Scott Flipse at [sflipse@uscirf.gov](mailto:sflipse@uscirf.gov).

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at [tcarter@uscirf.gov](mailto:tcarter@uscirf.gov), or (202) 523-3257.