

The following article, written by Rachel Vanderbrink, appeared in Radio Free Asia on June 19, 2012 at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/monk-beaten-06192012154610.html> .

Vietnamese police have beaten a monk who is a member of an outlawed Buddhist association after pulling him over for not wearing a helmet, an overseas rights group said Tuesday. Thich Quang Thanh, a member of the unsanctioned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), was beaten June 10 by traffic police in southern Vietnam's Dong Nai province, the Paris-based Vietnam Committee on Human Rights said in a statement. After he was pulled over while riding a motorbike on Highway 51, Thich Quang Thanh apologized and prepared to pay a fine for not wearing a helmet, but police threw the motorbike in their truck and punched him in the face, the rights group said. After calling for backup, a group of policemen pinned him to the ground, beat him with a truncheon and trampled on him, stopping him from calling for help, the group said. They also stopped passers-by who tried to interfere, it said.

Police took him in for questioning in Phuoc Thai village, releasing him several hours later.

Thich Quang Thanh shortly after being beaten by police on June 10, 2012. Photo courtesy of Vietnam Committee on Human Rights.

The unregistered UBCV, with followers around Vietnam, has clashed with officials since its founding in the 1960s. Its leader, Thich Quang Do, lives under house arrest in Saigon.

Religious activity is closely monitored in the one-party Vietnamese state, where religious groups must operate under government-controlled management boards.

The only recognized Buddhist church in the country is the Buddhist Church of Vietnam, an organization run by the Fatherland Front, a peripheral organization of the ruling Communist Party.

In May, senior UBCV monks in Vietnam said they faced increasing threats and pressure from

police in three central provinces to ban celebrations of the anniversary of the Buddha's birth.

The
U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)
, a congressional watchdog, has said the Vietnamese government severely restricts and penalizes independent religious practice and represses individuals and groups viewed as challenging its authority.

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