



## **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing**

### **Vietnam: Challenges and Opportunities for Religious Freedom**

#### **Panel**



**Quynh-Vi Tran** is the Co-Director of the Legal initiatives for Vietnam (LIV) and Editor-in-Chief of *The Vietnamese Magazine*, an independent and non-profit online magazine that focuses on Vietnam's politics and raises public awareness on the human rights situation and political development in Vietnam among the international community. She was a litigation lawyer in Menlo Park and San Jose, California before becoming a democracy advocate and journalist in 2015. She specializes in Vietnam's freedom of expression and criminal justice and is also a strong advocate for the abolition of the death penalty. In 2021, Ms. Tran was accepted as a Democracy and Human Rights

Service Fellow at the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD). She graduated from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism in 2023.



**Dr. Thang Nguyen** (Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang) is the CEO and President of Boat People SOS (BPSOS). He arrived in the United States in 1979 as a boat refugee from Vietnam. He graduated from Virginia Tech with a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering and worked for 13 years at a research lab in Bethesda, Maryland. He joined BPSOS in 1988 as a volunteer. Under his leadership, BPSOS launched an advocacy campaign in 1995 that resulted in the resettlement of over 18,000 former boat people from Vietnam to the United States. In 1997, Dr. Thang initiated a long-term effort to build capacity for the Vietnamese American community and has since mentored or incubated over 50 faith-based and community organizations, securing \$4 million to support their good work. In 2001, he left his engineering career to dedicate himself fully to defending and promoting human rights for all. For the past two decades he has launched or co-launched many national and international initiatives, including among others Legal Assistance for Vietnamese Asylum Seekers (LAVAS) to provide legal aid to the boat people in first asylum camps, Coalition to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA) to combat labor trafficking, the Vietnam Freedom of Religion or Belief (VNFORB) Roundtable, and the Southeast Asia Freedom of Religion or Belief (SEAFORB) Network. Under his leadership, BPSOS' Civil Society Development Initiative has since 2015 trained over 2,000 members of some 200 persecuted religious communities in Vietnam to identify and report rights violations, resulting in over 500

violation reports submitted to UN mandate holders, the U.S. Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and various diplomatic missions in Vietnam. Dr. Thang currently serves on the Steering Committee of the International Religious Freedom Summit and the Council of Experts of International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA).



**Venerable Truong, Thach Dhammo**, a distinguished Khmer-Krom Buddhist monk, was born in 1963 during the Vietnam War, in Bac Lieu province, in the Mekong Delta, also known as "Kampuchea-Krom" in Khmer. In 1980 he was ordained as a Samanera and took higher ordination as a Theravada Buddhist monk in 1985. Driven by the upheavals of the Vietnam War and its aftermath, he sought refuge in Cambodia before traversing the border to the Dangkek Refugee Camp in Thailand. After a five-year wait, he was granted Refugee status under Canada's protection in the late 1990s. In Toronto, Venerable Dhammo embraced education, community involvement, and temple establishment within the Asian diaspora, particularly among Khmer, Khmer-Krom, and Vietnamese communities. His leadership was instrumental in establishing Buddhist Temples in Toronto, London, Windsor, Vancouver, and Orlando, Florida. Since November 1999, he has served as Abbot at the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Buddhist Temple of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. As the Khmer Krom Buddhist Monks' Association of North America president, he champions the cause of religious freedom for fellow Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks within the Mekong Delta, travelling across Canada and the United States. As Director of Religious Affairs at the Khmer Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF), he further underscores his commitment to advocating for the voiceless Khmer-Krom and their fundamental rights. His advocacy extends globally as he, alongside KKF leaders, reports on the oppression of Khmer-Krom's religious freedom at prestigious platforms such as the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and the United Nations.



**Dr. Quoc-Hung (David) Tran** serves as Director of Communications for the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and heads its Office of External Affairs. He has been active in community services for the last 40 years. Dr. Tran was a national facilitator for Asian Pacific Islander Institute of Department of Health and Human Services. He is a practicing child and adolescent psychiatrist since 1995. He graduated from University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston in 1991 and summa cum laude from Texas Lutheran University. He was a recipient of many American Medical Association (AMA) Physician Recognition Awards. He received the 1995 AMA Leadership Award and the 1994 American Psychiatric Association Minority Research Training Fellowship. He was on the faculty of University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center as a Clinical Assistant Professor.