

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in Vietnam remained poor, particularly for religious minorities, religious freedom dissidents, and predominantly Christian ethnic minority groups. The Vietnamese government targeted defenders of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and members of unregistered religious groups with threats, detention, and imprisonment.

The 2018 Law on Belief and Religion (LBR) and its implementing decrees remained the principal tool for authorities to manage religious affairs. Authorities also used other ill-defined national security provisions in the Penal Code, such as Articles 116 (“undermining national solidarity”), 117 (“disseminating anti-state propaganda”), and 331 (“abusing democratic freedoms”), to prosecute targeted citizens.

Of the prisoners in USCIRF’s FoRB Victims List, dozens are still serving their sentences, and authorities continued with more arrests and sentencing of independent religious adherents and religious freedom advocates throughout 2025. Central Highland authorities in Gia Lai and Dak Lak Provinces sentenced Montagnard Christians [Ro Cham Grong](#), [Y Po Mlo](#), and [Y Think Nie](#) to prison terms of seven to nine years in March and May and arrested pastor [Y Nuen Ayun](#) in October, all under Article 116. In July, authorities in An Giang Province sentenced [Ho Trong Phuc](#), a 17-year-old independent Hoa Hao Buddhist, to one year in prison under Article 331, while a Vinh Long court sentenced Khmer Krom Buddhist monk [Kim Som Rinh](#) and two Khmer Krom activists each to three and half years in prison under Article 331 in November. In 2025, Long An authorities added three years of house arrest to a five-year sentence for Thien Am Buddhist (formerly known as Peng Lei Buddhist House Church) leader [Le Tung Van](#) and eight years of additional prison time to monk [Le Thanh Nhat Nguyen](#)’s four-year sentence. In September, independent Hoa Hao Buddhist [Vuong Van Tha](#) died in prison while serving a 12-year sentence for “disseminating anti-state propaganda.” In October, a Lam Dong court sentenced Protestant pastor [Nguyen Manh Hung](#) to six years in prison under Article 117.

Vietnamese authorities continued to pressure adherents of independent religious groups to join the approved state-sponsored religious organizations. This included authorities subjecting ethnic Montagnard and Hmong Christians to persistent surveillance and harassment, frequent home visits, disruption of religious gatherings, physical abuse, and forced renunciation of faith to pressure them to join state-sanctioned churches affiliated with the Evangelical Church of Vietnam or disband. Authorities throughout the year harassed Buddhists not practicing under the state-sanctioned Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), including publicly disparaging ascetic Dhutanga monk Thich Minh Tue and his followers as well as preventing Thien Am monks and nuns from shaving their heads.

In 2025, the Vietnamese government engaged in notable transnational repression. In February, Vietnam’s Ministry of Public Security (MPS) designated U.S.-based rights organization Boat People SOS and Thailand-based rights organization Montagnards Stand for Justice (MSFJ) as terrorist groups, creating pretense to extraterritorially suppress foreign nongovernmental organizations. In November, Thailand’s government extradited Montagnard religious freedom activist [Y Quynh Bdap](#) to Vietnam despite Bdap being a registered refugee. Bdap faces a 10-year sentence for a terrorism conviction in absentia for his leadership of MSFJ. In February, Thai authorities—reportedly acting under Vietnamese pressure—raided a funeral for Bdap’s mother-in-law in Bangkok and detained 65 Montagnard asylum seekers. In April, Sri Lankan police disrupted Thich Minh Tue’s pilgrimage reportedly following pressure from VBS. Pro-government Vietnamese individuals continued to follow and surveil Thich Minh Tue’s group as they journeyed through Asia. In January, the Vietnamese government attempted to disrupt Vietnamese participation in the 2025 International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, DC, by banning three followers of independent religious groups from leaving Vietnam while surveilling others present at the event with video recordings and online doxing.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Designate Vietnam as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
 - Call on the Vietnamese government to amend or repeal Articles 116, 117, and 331 of the Criminal Code, all of which are used to target adherents of independent religious groups and violate Vietnam’s international human rights commitments;
 - Engage with the newly established Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs in Vietnam to encourage amending the LBR in line with international standards to guarantee the right to FoRB for all; and
 - Press Vietnam as a reelected United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) member to allow visits from UNHRC human rights experts or special rapporteur on FoRB to assess FoRB conditions.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Raise Vietnam’s ongoing FoRB concerns through the Congressional Vietnam Caucus by holding hearings, meetings, and congressional delegation visits advocating for the release of FoRB prisoners; and
 - Introduce legislative efforts to improve religious freedom in Vietnam, such as the Vietnam Human Rights Act ([H.R. 3122](#)).

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- Country Update: [Vietnam](#)
- Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2

Background

Vietnam has a diverse religious landscape with prevalent influence of Buddhism, folk religion, and Chinese spirituality. Catholicism, Protestantism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, and Cao Daim are among the other religious traditions with notable representation. In 2025, the government officially recognized 43 religious organizations and 16 religions, with no increase from last year.

Vietnam's constitution guarantees freedom of religion and states that citizens may practice or not practice any religion. Yet Vietnamese authorities often override these rights by applying its legal framework—such as the 2018 LBR and certain provisions of the Criminal Code—in the name of maintaining national security and social unity.

In February, Vietnam established the Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs as part of a sweeping government reorganization aimed at streamlining its political apparatus. The reorganization consolidated the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs and the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, formerly under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Restrictions on Religious Groups

Catholic communities continued to face land disputes with the government in 2025. In January, Da Nang authorities demolished a property owned by An Hoa Parish. In August, police in Thai Nguyen Province raided a Mass at a Catholic home church that authorities labeled unlicensed and cut off its electricity. In June, authorities in Ho Chi Minh City demolished a state-requisitioned facility belonging to the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. In September, the Redemptorist Order in Hue protested authorities suddenly erecting fences in preparation for construction on its expropriated L'Accueil site.

In 2025, the Vietnamese government escalated efforts to eliminate new religious movements throughout the country. In January, Ha Giang Province celebrated the complete eradication of the San Su Khe To belief, officially labeled as an “evil cult.” Also in January, Quang Nam authorities stopped followers of the Hoi Thanh Duc Chua Troi Me from holding an “unauthorized” religious gathering. Between July and September, Lao Cai provincial authorities cracked down on Falun Gong and the Church of Almighty God's (CAG) proselytization activities and claimed that they had “eradicated” five independent religious groups in the province (Thien Tong Tan Dieu, the Duong Van Minh group, CAG, Gie Sua, and Ba Co Do). In September, MPS officially banned CAG and all its activities nationwide.

International Accountability

In July, the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) [issued its findings](#) on Vietnam's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights compliance, following its review of the country during its 144th session. UNHRC stated concern about Vietnam's alleged suppression of FoRB through criminalizing religious practices, preventing religious

gatherings, seizing religious properties, coercing renunciation of faith, and denying legal recognition to religious groups. In the same month, in response to the 2023 [Concluding Observations](#) of the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, while acknowledging the lack of cohesion in applying and enforcing the legal framework governing religious affairs, Vietnam [denied](#) its use of force and abuse of power by law enforcement and local authorities against individuals and leaders of ethnic and religious minority groups. In August, UN experts [expressed](#) serious concern over reports of escalating repression against Khmer Krom individuals in Vietnam, including more than 17 human rights defenders, Theravada Buddhist monks, and followers. In October, the Vietnamese government responded to UN experts' inquiry about Tibetan monk Tulku Hungkar Dorje's mysterious death in March while in country, denying state involvement.

Key U.S. Policy

In January, then Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Dafna Rand, joined by then Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain, traveled to Hanoi to convene the [28th U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue](#) where they discussed a wide range of human rights issues, including the protection of FoRB. In July, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio [met](#) with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son in Malaysia on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Foreign Ministers' Meeting, during which they celebrated the 30th anniversary of U.S.-Vietnam diplomatic ties and discussed strengthening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In September, Secretary Rubio [met](#) with Vietnamese President Luong Cuong and acting Foreign Minister Le Hoai Trung during the UN General Assembly in New York, where they reaffirmed the importance of the bilateral relationship. Religious freedom was not publicly mentioned in either of Secretary Rubio's engagements with Vietnam. In November, U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth traveled to Hanoi to discuss potential U.S. arms sales to Vietnam.

In April, Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ), along with three democratic representatives, introduced the Vietnam Human Rights Act ([H.R. 3122](#)). The bill prioritizes human rights for U.S.-Vietnam relations and grants the secretary of state the authority to sanction Vietnamese officials who are complicit in torture and the systematic suppression of religious freedom. In July, Senators Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Steve Daines (R-MT) introduced [S. Res. 321](#), commemorating 30 years of diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam, with a mention of the promotion and protection of human rights in Vietnam.

The U.S. Department of State last [placed](#) Vietnam on its Special Watch List (SWL) under IRFA for severe violations of religious freedom on December 29, 2023.