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*The child monks with their adoptive family (November 2021)*

## **Negative Impacts of Religious Persecution on Ten Child Monks at Thiền Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ (TABBVT)**

Joint Submission to  
the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child  
Regarding Vietnam's Implementation  
of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

August 15, 2022

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## Introduction

This report is submitted by Boat People SOS (BPSOS), with contributions from Ms. Tanya Nguyen-Do, a Florida-based Vietnamese American who has conducted advocacy on behalf of the affected children.<sup>1</sup>

This report addresses the following items in the List of Issues:

**6. (a) How the State party ensures that recent legislation, including the Law on cybersecurity, the Law on access to information, the Press Law, the Penal Code and the Law on religion and belief respect and ensure children's right to privacy, access to appropriate information, and freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly and religion.**

This report highlights the severe detrimental impacts on ten (10) child monks when their caregivers and mentors, all followers of an unaffiliated and unregistered Buddhist group, were targeted by government for persecution. This group, known as Thiền Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ (TABBBVT) and formerly known as Tịnh Thất Bồng Lai (TTBL), has experienced physical and verbal attacks from the Vietnamese government and the government-sanctioned Buddhist Church of Vietnam (BCV) since 2019.

Based on allegations from clergy members of BCV, in late 2021 the police department of Đức Hoà District, Long An Province prosecuted key members of the TABBBVT group on charges of incest, appropriation of others' property through fraud and "abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights, and interests of organizations and/or citizens." The first two charges were later dropped.

In July 2022, the group's founder, who is 90 years old, and five young monks in training were tried for defaming the Public Security Office of Duc Hoa District, Buddha and Buddhism, and a prominent member of the BCV; and of distorting Buddha's teaching. They were sentenced to a total of 23.5 years in prison. At least one other group member, an old woman with terminal cancer, is under prosecution.

The group was also subjected defamatory attacks by the local government, influential members of BCV, state media, and youtubers. The numerous media and/or physical attacks on TABBBVT by the police, thugs, the state-run media, and BCV leaders have left emotional scars on the child monks, aged 8 months to 8 years, who are now separated from their caregivers and face an uncertain future.

In this case, the government of Vietnam not only violated Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) but also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.heraldtribune.com/story/news/local/2022/01/16/north-port-woman-seeks-raise-awareness-5-little-monks-vietnam/6518969001/>

***Article 331. Abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights, and interests of organizations and/or citizens***

- 1. Any person who abuses the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of association, and other democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights, and interests of organizations and/or citizens shall receive a warning or face a penalty of up to 3 years of community sentence or 6 - 36 months in prison.*
- 2. If the offense has a negative impact on social security, order, or safety, the offender shall face a penalty of 2-7 years in prison.*

**Article 18 of ICCPR.**

- 1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.*
- 2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.*
- 3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.*
- 4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.*

## **Background**

This report presents the case of ten (10) minors from the TABBVT group who have directly suffered from persecution and who now lack proper care and support when the only family they have ever known has been practically torn apart in violation of Vietnam's domestic law and in non-compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as Article 18 of the ICCPR.

### **1. The child monks**

Mr. Lê Tùng Vân (born in 1932) was a dignitary in the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương religion, an endogenous Buddhist Sect founded in 1849. Like many Buddhist sects originated in Southern Vietnam, Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương sought to make Buddha's teaching more accessible to the peasantry. Namely, it promoted home-based religious practice instead of building pagodas with resident monks. This approach appealed to poverty-stricken peasants in rural parts of Vietnam because they did not have to offer expensive alms to the clerics and incur additional expenses visiting the pagodas. Instead, these sects often prioritize charity work serving the poor and the vulnerable. Hoà Hảo Buddhism, which is better known to the outside world, is considered by many as a spin-off from Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương.

In 1990, Mr. Lê Tùng Vân established a safe house for the elderly and orphans, naming it Trại Thánh Đức (Sacred Virtues Camp). By 2007, this facility housed 56 elderly and 20 orphans. In 2015, after that facility was destroyed by a fire, Mr. Lê Tùng Vân and several of his disciples relocated in Đức Hoà District, Long An Province. Ms. Cao Thị Cúc, a follower, offered a piece of land to the group at no cost to build a new facility, which became known as "Tĩnh Thất Bồng Lai" (Fairyland Vihara). In early 2020, it was renamed Thiền Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ (Meditation Shrine on the Edge of the Universe). Mr. Lê Tùng Vân is called "Grandfather Master" by his disciples.

At this new facility, the group continued to take care of abandoned children as part of their religious doctrine. Most of these children were abandoned by their biological mothers at birth and adopted by female monks of TABBVT, who are listed as "mother" on birth certificates. Once reaching adulthood, some children decided to stay in monkhood and take care of the next generation of child monks; others left the facility to pursue their own careers but often came back to assist the group in diverse capacities.

As part of their education, the child monks were not only taught Buddhist virtues and practice but also trained in drawing, painting, music, singing, acting and other performing arts. Many of them developed amazing talents and attracted national attention. In 2014, Lê Thanh Huyền Trân, age 12, won second place in a national singing contest (The Voice Kids). She was invited to many televised musical shows, but had to quit performing after she was told to shed her religious appearance and hide her religious background on stage.



*Lê Thanh Huyền Trân on the stage of The Voice Kids contest (source: Baodautu.vn)*

In 2017, two young TABBVT monks, Lê Thanh Hoàn Nguyên and Lê Thanh Nhất Nguyên, age 17 and 16 at the time, participated in the Tuyệt Đỉnh Song Ca (Top Singing Duets) talent show. They reached the final stage but were dropped out of the contest due to the opposition of the government-created Buddhist Church of Vietnam (BCV), which arbitrarily dictated that monks should not sing on stage even though the two young monks were not affiliated with BCV.



*Lê Thanh Hoàn Nguyên and Lê Thanh Nhất Nguyên on stage at “Top Singing Duet” Contest, 2017 (source: eva.vn)*

In 2018, three young monks Lê Thanh Trùng Dương, Lê Thanh Nhất Tuệ and Lê Thanh Nhi Nguyên swept the bronze, silver and gold medals at the city-wide body building contest organized by HCM City. This created a stir among public opinion.

Also in 2018, five child monks, aged 3 to 4, lovingly called “The Five Child Monks” Band, won the first prize in a stand-up comedy contest on national television. They won first prize again the following year, earning the title of “The Youngest Talents in Vietnam’s Guinness in 2019.” Their film production “Luật Nhân Quả” (The Law of Karma) was submitted for screening at International New York Children Film Festival Contestants, Sarasota Children Film Festival Contestants, and Los Angelo's International Film Festival Contestants. Their YouTube channel “5 Chú Tiểu – Thiền Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ” had 2.12 million subscribers. It generated significant revenue to support the TABBVT group’s good work.



*Grandfather Master Lê Tùng Vân and “The Five Child Monks” Band*



*The child monks reaching the milestone of one million followers on youtube*

These sensational achievements inspired many fans in Vietnam and overseas to support the good work of TABBVT. One such supporter is Ms. Tanya Nguyễn-Đỗ, who taught English remotely to the child monks and who contributed significantly to this report.

By the time TABBVT group was practically dismantled in early 2022, the child monks lived happily as part of the only family they have ever known, had so much fun while developing amazing talents, and looked forward to a fulfilling life. Their dire present conditions and uncertain future form the gist of this report.



*TABBVT's facility in Đức Hoà District, Long An Province (photo of Soha.vn)*

## 2. Multiple attacks on TABBVT

On September 28, 2019, Võ Thị Diễm My (born 1999) came to TABBVT asking for refuge – she ran away from her father whom she alleged to have sexually abused her with her mother’s collusion – her mother allegedly was a victim of ongoing domestic violence. Ms. Diễm My applied for temporary residence permit to stay at TABBVT and was issued one by the local people’s committee. She decided to become a female monk and was given the religious name Chơn Ngọc Tiên by Mr. Lê Tùng Vân.



### 5 Chú Tiểu | DIỄM MY RẠNG RỖ TRONG BUỔI LỄ XUẤT GIA VÀ NHẬN PHÁP DANH...!!

3,034,899 views Nov 13, 2019 Quý cô bác, anh chị hãy bấm ĐĂNG KÝ KÊNH để ủng hộ tụi con nha! ...more

*Ms. Võ Thị Diễm My at her initiation ceremony, November 13, 2019*

*Screenshot from original video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Be5iX-iAVyY>*

On October 13, 2109, her parents came to TABBVT to look for her, but she was not there. Then on October 24, her father returned with a mob of some 50 individuals. They trespassed the premise of TABBVT, ransacked its facility, beat group members, and stole their collective life savings totaling 305 million VND (13,000 USD). One young monk, Lê Thanh Nhị Nguyên, was hacked with a machete; he suffered severe injuries. Fearing for their life, TABBVT members hid the child monks in a dilapidated shed in the woods, where they stayed for days awaiting for police intervention. Ms. Diễm My was not at TABBVT at the time. She had already relocated to a Buddhist temple in Bà Rịa – Vũng Tàu Province.

In a denunciation letter dated December 2020 that she sent to Vietnam’s President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly, Minister of Public Security and Vietnam Women’s

Union, among others, Ms. Diễm My disclosed that her father hired and led some 50 thugs to attack TABBVT so as to capture her and bring her home by force. Incarcerated in her room, she overheard her parents planning the attack.

TABBVT reported the incident to the Đức Hoà District public security police, which conducted a summary and superficial investigation. On April 15, 2021, the People's Court of Đức Hoà District sentenced only one female mob member, Ms. Châu Vinh Hoá, to 2 years in prison and ordered that she pay 8.93 million VND (approximately 382 USD) to Lê Thanh Nhị Nguyên. No other perpetrator was held accountable, including Ms. Diễm My's father who instigated the mob attack, for trespassing, conspiracy, destruction of property, or robbery. On September 12, 2021, the appeals court commuted Ms. Hoá's prison sentence to a suspended one. Reflecting on this ruling, a TABBVT member opinionated on youtube that there was either negligence or cover-up by the responsible authorities. The police later cited this statement as evidence of its being defamed by TABBVT.



*Young monk Lê Thanh Nhị Nguyên with injuries to his face after being attacked by the mob, October 24, 2019*

Upon learning of the violent attack, Ms. Diễm My returned to provide moral support to TABBVT members and clarify that she was not being held at TABBVT as suspected by her father. The police sent her invitations, inviting her to their station purportedly for an interview as part of their investigation into the violent attack. Twice, she refused to go fearing that the police would capture her and deliver her to her parents against her will; Mr. Lê Tùng Vân reassured her that she had nothing to be afraid of. This conversation was captured [on video](#).

On December 12, 2019, Ms. Diễm My went to the police station along with Ms. Cao Thị Cúc, a TABBVT member. Once inside, she was separated from Ms. Cúc and taken by police officer Trần Quốc Khánh to a room where five police officers, two male and three females, were awaiting. In [a video](#) posted on youtube on October 31, 2020, Ms. Diễm My described in detail how she was abducted: the police officers grabber her, holding tight her arms and legs and muzzling her mouth; they shoved her into an ambulance car waiting outside and under guard by scores of public security police officers.

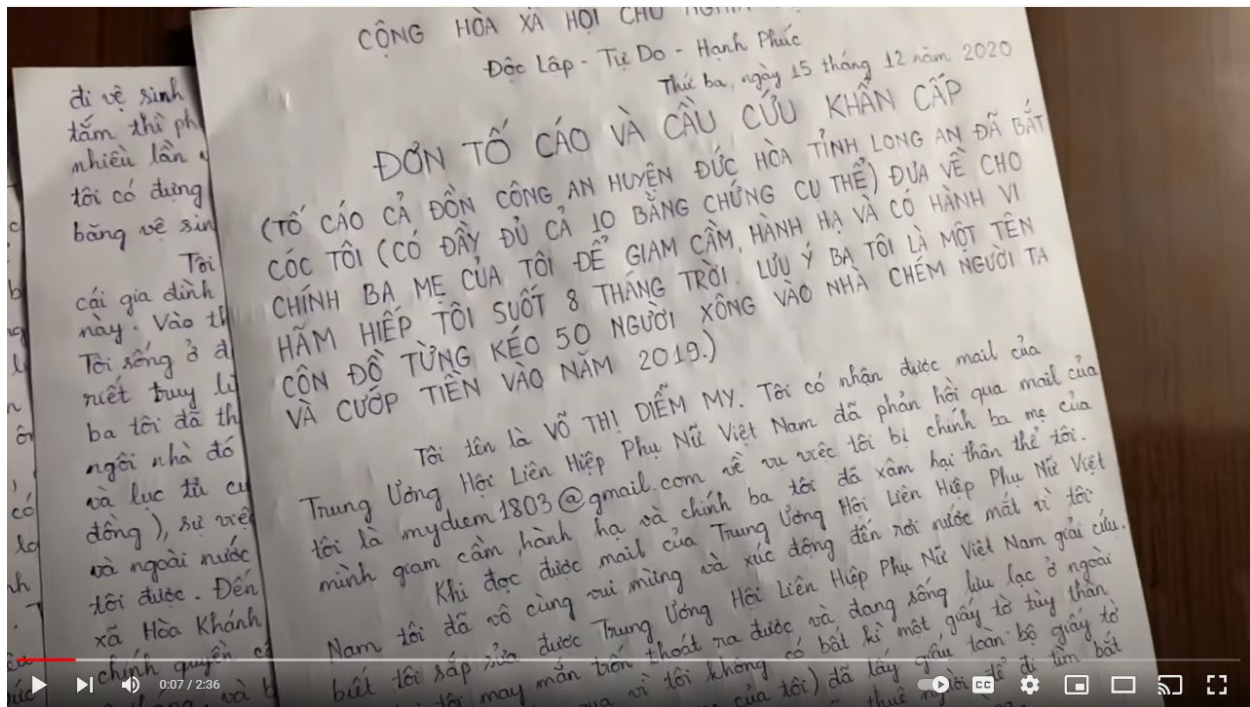
Not seeing Ms. Diễm My coming out after a long while, Ms. Cúc and TABBVT members waiting outside sounded the alarm at the prospect that Ms. Diễm My might have been taken away against her will by the police. They felt responsible for her safety. Additionally, Mr. Lê Tùng Vân expressed concern that her father would blame TABBVT for her disappearance would launch another brutal attack against TABBVT. Some TABBVT members expressed concern on [Facebook livestream](#) that Ms. Diễm My might have been abducted by the police. The police later used this statement to prosecute the TABBVT group.

After the abduction, the police delivered Ms. Diễm My to her parents' home, where she was held like a prisoner and treated by her father "as an animal... as a prostitute rather than his daughter," according to her [videotaped testimony](#). Her parents took away her cell phone, all her personal documents. She also explained that she sought refuge at TABBVT to escape from her father, who had sexually abused her for years. After being redelivered to her parents, the sexual abuses resumed. In the same video, she disclosed that the police of Đức Hoà District and state media came to her home, staged a video interview, and coerced her to admit that she was not abducted by the police. Defying order by the police, she reaffirmed her abduction and asked to be rescued from her abusive father. The interview as never aired. About eight months later, she successfully fled from home and went into hiding.

In the same video, she also rebutted allegation made by The Most Venerable Thích Minh Thiện (secular name Trương Ngọc Toàn), who justified police action by accusing her of being wrong for joining monkhood without parental approval.

In [another video](#) made from her hiding place, Ms. Diễm My reported that she had sent a letter dated December 15, 2020 to then Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc, Minister of Public Security Tô Lâm and the Vietnam Women's Union, among others. The letter was titled "Denunciation and Request for Urgent Help" – Denouncing the Public Security of Đức Hoà District, Long An Province for having abducted me (with 10 pieces of specific evidence) and delivering me to my mother and father, who detained me, abused me, and raped me for eight straight months. Note that my father is a thug, who brought 50 individuals to hack people [with a machete] and robbed them of their money in 2019).

Only the Vietnam Women's Union acknowledged receipt of her letter. We are unaware of any actions taken by this organization or any other recipients.



*Screenshot from said video of Ms. Diễm My's denunciation letter*

### 3. Criminal prosecution against TABBVT

In a [youtube video](#) posted on October 31, 2021, The Most Venerable Thích Minh Thiện, head of VBC – Long An Province and abbot of Thiên Châu Pagoda, denounced that TABBVT was not recognized by VBC and therefore could not be a Buddhist facility, which TABBVT falsely claimed to be; that its members misrepresented themselves as Buddhist followers and monks and profited from false claims that the children were orphans. He concluded that TABBVT violated the law. In the same video, several government officials backed up the allegations of this VBC leader and promised thorough investigation.

On November 24, 2021, The Venerable Thích Nhật Từ, a member of the Administrative Council of BCV and abbot of Giác Ngộ Pagoda in Hồ Chí Minh City and well-known for his frequent attacks against Christianity<sup>2</sup>, sent a denunciation letter to the Director of the Department of Public Security of Long An Province, making multiple allegations against TABBVT, including:

- (i) The female monks who posed as the adoptive mothers of the child monks were actually their biological mothers;
- (ii) Many of these children were fathered by Mr. Lê Tùng Vân and the female monks who were actually his daughters;
- (iii) Mr. Lê Tùng Vân took advantage of the children, falsely claiming them to be orphaned in order to solicit donations.
- (iv) Mr. Lê Tùng Vân offended him by stating that he was “stupid as an ox”;
- (v) Mr. Lê Tùng Vân offended Buddha by interpreting his teaching in a humorous way;
- (vi) Mr. Lê Tùng Vân misrepresented evolution theory in claiming that Buddha would evolve into a higher form of consciousness – according to Thích Nhật Từ, Buddha has already achieved the highest form of consciousness;
- (vii) Mr. Lê Tùng Vân falsely claimed to be a Buddhist master without consent by BCV.

The Venerable Thích Nhật Từ requested that the police initiate criminal investigation against TABBVT, prosecute Mr. Lê Tùng Vân and his disciples for blasphemy against Buddha and for offending him (Thích Nhật Từ), conduct DNA tests of the children and the female monks, investigate all the monetary contributions received by TABBVT to uncover evidence of “appropriation of property through fraud”; prohibit Mr. Lê Tùng Vân and TABBVT members from shaving their heads, wearing saffron robes, or addressing themselves as Buddhist monks; end the scam of fake monks, fake temples, fake child monks, fake orphans; dismantle the facility of TABBVT; and force TABBVT group to take down all videos covering initiation rituals and stop calling their facility a meditation institution, a meditation shrine, a vihara as these were terminologies to exclusively designate Buddhist facilities.

On January 4, 2022, based on the allegations of the two BVC leaders, the police of Đức Hoà District, Long An Province decided to prosecute TABBVT on three charges: (1) incest, (2) appropriation of property through fraud, and (3) abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights, and interests of organizations and/or citizens. According

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<sup>2</sup> One example of his diatribe against Catholicism and Protestantism:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HJ4Vwk5O5g>

to trial record, on February 24, 2022, The Most Venerable Thích Minh Thiện sent an official denunciation letter accusing TABBVT for falsely calling themselves Buddha, offending and distorting Buddha's teaching.

The Office of Public Security of Đức Hoà District, the prosecuting authority, then claimed itself to be a victim of defamation when TABBVT members alleged that the police had abducted Ms. Diễm My and overlooked criminal offenses committed by the thugs who attacked TABBVT on October 24, 2019. Senior Lt. Col. Nguyễn Sơn, head of the public security office of Đức Hoà District, appeared as victim at the trial on July 21, 2022, while his subordinates were present as prosecutors. Note that Ms. Diễm My, in her videotaped testimony affirmed that she was abducted by the public security police under the command of Mr. Trần Quốc Thắng on December 12, 2020. She also denounced the police for covering up for her father, who paid and led the 50 thugs in their attack on TABBVT on October 24, 2019.

On July 25, 2020, using the pretext that a person by the name Đinh Thanh Hải reported fever and coughing after visiting TABBVT's facility to offer gifts to the child monks, government officials wearing civilian clothes without identification came to TABBVT facility, rounded up 17 adult members of TABBVT,<sup>3</sup> took them to a waiting bus and locked them therein with no ventilation or access to food or water. [A video posted on youtube](#) showed TABBVT members asking for a loaf of plain bread as they were hungry and to have ventilation turned on because it was simmering hot inside. None of their requests was answered.

After hours of incarceration in sweltering heat, their body temperatures increased; the authorities accused them of possibly having COVID-19 and took them to a quarantine area where they were forced to undergo blood tests to test for COVID-19 although everyone else in the quarantine area was tested using a nose swab. TABBVT subsequently disclaimed that the person by the name Đinh Thanh Hải ever visited TABBVT on July 25 – the security cams installed in their facility showed no visit by Đinh Văn Hải on that day or any day prior or after.

Ms. Diễm My, in [her videotaped testimony](#), disclosed that while being locked in a room upstairs, she overheard her parents discussing how to obtain blood samples of TABBVT members for DNA tests to prove incestual relationships as alleged by the Venerable Thích Nhật Từ.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://vnexpress.net/cach-ly-17-nguoi-tai-tinh-that-bong-lai-4136024.html>



*Screenshots from a video taken by one of the monks showing the TABBVT members sitting in the bus and undergoing blood test. Link to original video:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcpqqbYw8fI>

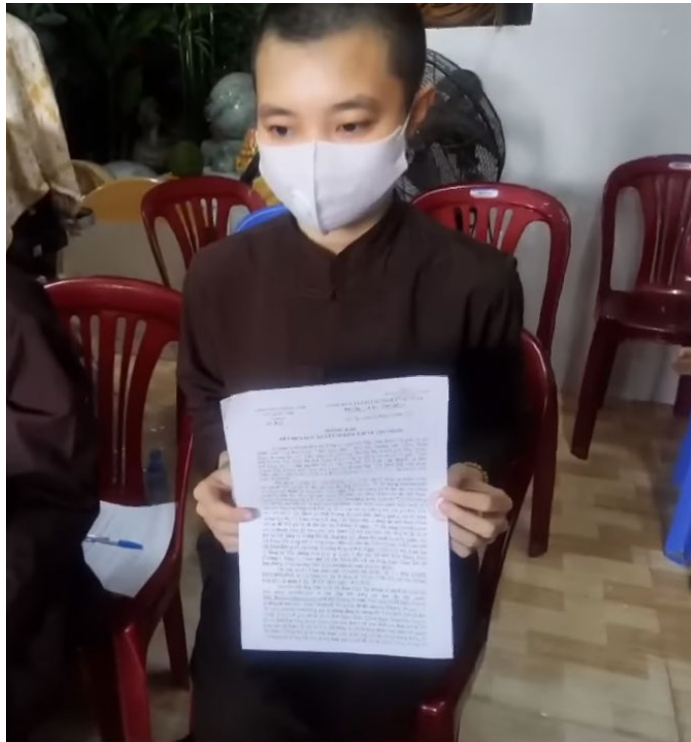
Soon, fabricated DNA results appeared on the social media along with accusations of incest, claiming that many of the female monks were Mr. Lê Tùng Vân's biological daughters and the child monks were conceived through incestual relationship between him and these female monks. These accusations were accompanied by a made-up DNA tree.



*Made-up DNA tree (screenshot from Facebook)*

On January 4, 2022, the police raided TABBVT and announced its prosecution decision. Two days later, a police investigator forcibly took Ms. Bùi Ngọc Trâm (born 1997, religious name Chon Ngọc Xuân), a Buddhist monk who took care of the child monks, to gynecological examination at Xuyên Á Hospital (located in Đức Hoà District). She was ordered to take off her clothes, and a medical staff poked an equipment into her vagina. After the incident, she filed a complaint. A legal counsel for TABBVT [reported](#) that, on March 28, the police of Đức Hoà District admitted to taking Ms. Trâm to gynecological examination to verify if she was the adoptive mother of one of the child monks as claimed and not his biological mother. The police, however, alleged that she voluntarily agreed to the medical procedure. Ms. Bùi Ngọc Trâm, in a follow-up declaration, categorically asserted that she was taken away by force. The police then invited Ms. Bùi Ngọc Trâm to an interview as part of the investigation. The investigator turned

out to be the same police officer who forcibly took her to the gynecological examination. Ms. Trâm refused to talk to him. The police investigation never took place.



*Ms. Bùi Ngọc Trâm holding her complaint letter*

Three TABBVT members were arrested on January 4: Lê Thanh Nhật Nguyên (1991), Lê Thanh Tùng Dương (1995), and Lê Thanh Hoàn Nguyên (1990). Mr. Lê Tùng Vân was prosecuted but allowed to stay home due to his old age. On May 12, Ms. Cao Thị Cúc, the TABBVT member who offered the use of her land, was arrested.

On June 2, the investigation unit of the Public Security Department of Long An Province announced its conclusion and recommended that TABBVT be prosecuted for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights, and interests of organizations and/or citizens” (Article 331 of the Penal Code). Lacking evidence, the police dropped its first two charges: incest and appropriation of property through fraud. On June 8, the Procuracy of Long An Province announced prosecution based on Article 331.

The trial took place on July 21. Of the three proclaimed victims, only one was present: the Public Security Office, represented by its Head, Lt. Col. Nguyễn Sơn. The other two victims were absent: the BCV of Long An Province and The Venerable Thích Nhật Từ. As the defense counsels objected to the police acting as both victim and prosecutor, the court overruled, explaining that the Public Security Office of Đức Hoà District at first acted as prosecutor on the basis of the allegations made by the other two victims and only added itself to the case as a victim later.

At trial, two TABBVT members reported that they were beaten during interrogation by the police, a charge that the police denied.<sup>4</sup>

The people's court of Đức Hoà District sentenced Mr. Lê Tùng Vân (90 years old) to 5 years in prison, 3 of his disciples to 4 years each, another disciple to 3.5 years, and Ms. Cao Thị Cúc, who donated a plot of land to TABBVT, to 3 years.

On May 10, the police announced prosecution against Ms. Lê Thu Vân, a 65-years old woman with terminal colon cancer, for being an accomplice of Mr. Lê Tùng Vân in abusing democratic freedoms under Article 331. Her trial date is yet to be set.

## **Impacts on the children**

### **1. Discrimination and reprisal**

The children raised at TABBVT were discriminated against because of their religion or belief. Three of them had to abandon their artistic aspiration as they refused to quit TABBVT.

In 2014, Lê Thanh Huyền Trân, at the age of 12, had to make the hard decision to let go of her dream of becoming a professional singer as she would not accept demands that she grow her hair, get rid of her religious outfits, and quit monkhood.

In 2017, two young monks Lê Thanh Hoàn Nguyên and Lê Thanh Nhất Nguyên, at the age of 17 and 16 at the time, reached the final for a national singing contest but were dropped out of the competition after the Information and Communications Committee of BCV – Long An Province protested on the ground that their Buddhist group was not recognized by BCV and that Buddhist monks may not participate in singing activities.<sup>5</sup> The talent show's organizer apologized to BCV and promised that these two young monks would not appear on stage in their religious dresses. As they insisted on wearing their religious dark brown outfits, they were dropped out of the contest.

In 2018, an Australian benefactor invited all three to perform in Australia. The head of the Hòa Khánh Tây Commune's public security police, Mr. Nguyễn Hoàn Khải, demanded 300 million VND (approximately 13,000 USD) to issue citizenship ID documents, which is pre-requisite for passport application -- at the time, most TABBVT members were not issued personal documents by the local authorities. The Australian benefactor went on Facebook to denounce the corrupt police officer. He was reprimanded and transferred to another position. The three minor artists did not get their personal documents and missed a golden opportunity to perform in Australia.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.voatiengviet.com/a/vu-tinh-that-bong-lai-cong-an-bac-bo-dung-nhuc-hinh-voi-bi-cau/6666695.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://eva.vn/lang-sao/chan-tuong-su-viec-hai-su-thay-hot-nhat-viet-nam-thi-hat-bolero-duoc-lam-sang-to-c20a324184.html>



*Lê Thanh Huyền Trân (16) at audition for The Voice contest in 2018 (source: Saostar.vn)*



*Lê Thanh Hoàn Nguyên (17) and Lê Thanh Nhất Nguyên (16) receiving recognition on stage at Top Singing Duet competition, 2017 (source: Eva.vn)*

## 2. Witnessing violence

The child monks witnessed the mob attack on October 24, in which one of their caregivers was savagely hacked by the attackers. Their living quarters were ransacked and turned upside down. The savings used to support them was stolen. They had to hide in an abandoned shed in the nearby woods for days.



#Schutieu #thachthucdanhhai #tinhtatbonglai  
5 Chú Tiểu TTBL TRỐN VÀO RỪNG GIỮA ĐÊM KHUYA ĐỂ CẦU CỨU CÔNG AN GIÚP ĐỠ

*Screenshot from a video posted on youtube on December 4, 2019*

*Original video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKMcV6QSaRg>*

This traumatizing event was compounded by many subsequent physical attacks by thugs. The children lived in constant fear.



*A thug hacking at the front gate of TABBVT using a machete (uncertain date)*

Then, some 300 police, in both green uniforms and civilian clothes, raided the TABBVT facility on January 4, 2022 through its back door. According to eyewitnesses, the police blocked off the compound while others conducted room-to-room search of the entire facility using police dogs. The police cut off electricity and phone and wifi services. It then proceeded to take down all the 16 security cameras installed throughout the facility and the hard-drive storing their data, thus eliminating all evidence of the violence directed at TABBVT members. The police threatened the victims, confiscated documents and equipment, took all the cash found onsite, confiscated all electrical and electronic devices, and made TABBVT members sign documents without reading them. The children witnessed their caregivers handcuffed and taken away by the police.

*“... We were repressed by hundreds of people wearing public security uniforms, physically assaulted by them; our human rights violated by them.*

- 1. They searched our residence without a search warrant;*
- 2. They confiscated our personal possessions, computers, phones and personal documents; they took away all those things without a tallying report;*
- 3. We were subjected to forced admission of wrongdoing; they used force to restrain the arms and legs, twisted the fingers, squeezed the mouths of close to 20 members of our family to forcibly obtain our fingerprints for statements that we were not allowed to read.*
- 4. They arrested and took away all members of my family without any arrest warrant, releasing them only 4 – 5 days later.*
- 5. They forcibly took a female member of our family away to a private room. They forced her to take off her clothes, and they inserted something into her vagina. Her body was violated.*

*6. They assigned almost 20 people to monitor us throughout our residence; we lost all our freedom, all our human rights.*

*7. As of now, they have taken into custody 4 persons in our family: Lê Thanh Hoàn Nguyễn, Lê Thanh Nhất Nguyễn, Lê Thanh Trùng Dương, Lê Tùng Vân. They claimed that these four had abused democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state, organizations, individuals.” An eye-witness*

During the raid, the children had to hide wherever they could throughout the facility. In the aftermath of the raid, the child monks, worried and feeling abandoned, went through the residence, which was littered with trash and broken furniture, to search for their caregivers who had been taken away.

The police installed surveillance camera throughout the facility and placed officers to stay at the residence for months.

The police conducted a second raid on March 7. A pro bono legal counsel representing TABBVT was present. In [one video](#) in the series of video titled “Thiền Am Diary,” he described the child monks being frightened and fearful. They did not know what was going on but were intimidated by the presence of a large police force (over 100 officers) searching everywhere, taking away equipment and documents. They came with K9 dogs, members of the procuracy, support cadres, motorized police, and flycams.

These police’s raids on the compound and arrest of their caregivers were traumatizing to the child monks. In [a video](#) posted on youtube on May 13, child monk Đức Tâm, four-years old, expressed fear and destitution seeing his caregivers, particularly Ms. Cúc (aka Cô Đài), taken away. Explaining why he cried and fell ill, Đức Tâm said that he was afraid. He asked why his caregivers were arrested by the police even though they did not harm anyone, especially as “Cô Đài” was so benevolent. In another [video](#), Đức Tâm cried upon learning that his caregiver Lê Thanh Nhị Nguyễn was about to be arrested.



5 Chú Tiểu | Thầy Nhị Nguyên bị bắt . Những giây phút cuối cùng đệ tử và Thầy Nhị Nguyên

438,868 views • May 27, 2022

17K DISLIKE SHARE DOWNLOAD CLIP SAVE ...

*Last moment of child monk Đức Tâm (age 4) with his mentor Lê Thanh Nhị Nguyên, May 27, 2022*

With video production equipment taken away, wifi service cut off and their mentors imprisoned, the child monks can no longer pursue their artistic activities, which are integral to their education. Because TABBVT's only car was taken away by the police, the children were unable to attend school. As the police took away all the savings of TABBVT during the January 4 raid, which the police denied, there was no money left to buy milk or food for the children until the financial support from an overseas Good Samaritan arrived a few weeks later.

### 3. Stigma of incest allegation

The incest accusations caused psychological damages to the children who were old enough to understand it.

There are ten children living at TABBVT aged from 8 months to 8 years old including 6 boys and 4 girls. They were adopted by female monks at TABBVT. According to Vietnam's adoption law, the adoptive mother must fill her name in the child's birth certificate as his/her mother. State media distorted this fact to falsely claim that these female monks were biological mothers of the children. The Venerable Thích Nhật Từ escalated the allegation by accusing these female monks to be Mr. Lê Tùng Vân's own daughters and the children were born from incestual relationships.

In reality, these children came to TABBVT in different circumstances. Some were dropped off in front of its facility, and others were left at hospitals at birth by their biological mothers. In one case, a pair of twins were abandoned by their mother at the hospital. Most of the children did not have birth certificates until they were adopted by the female monks at TABBVT.



*Twins adopted by TABBVT's female monks*

The children did not fully understand the meaning of “incest,” but rumors at school caused the child monks to be ridiculed and isolated. For a period of time after incest accusations were widely circulated in the state-run media and social media, they were homeschooled for their safety.

#### **4. Uncertain future**

Since the January 4 raid, TABBVT members were under constant police surveillance inside their facility. The police were omnipresent and conducted frequent searches at the facility's living quarters. They permanently installed surveillance cameras throughout the facility. The only place without camera surveillance and not subjected to frequent police searches was the storage shed. That is where the ten child monks have stayed since the raid. Without air conditioning or ventilation, it's suffocatingly hot. A recent visitor from the United States compared it to a furnace – she initially planned spend time with the children but eventually had to find another place to stay. On rainy days, flooding from rainwater could go up to their knees.

About three months after the first raid, the police vacated the house, and the children were finally able to venture out to play. However, they were still forced to sleep in the storage room as the rest of the residence was filled with construction materials – using the money gained from their Youtube channels, TABBVT had started repair work. However, ongoing repair work on the facility had to be stopped for lack of finance -- during the January 4 raid, the police took all the cash found on the premise, which constituted all of TABBVT's savings. Many parts of the living quarters are deteriorating, making it dangerous to live in.



*The child monks now confined to the storage room (August 11, 2022)*



5 Chú Tiểu | NGHỆNG NGÀO ĐỨC TÂM BẬT KHÓC NƯỚC NỠ "CON SỢ 3 THẦY BỎ CON ĐI LUÔN RỒI KHÔNG CÒN VỀ NỮA"!

465,714 views • Jan 29, 2022

👍 20K 🗑 DISLIKE ➦ SHARE ⬇ DOWNLOAD ⚙ SAVE ...

*The child monks sleeping in the storage room, January 29, 2022*

*Screenshot from video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QCejbV2Csw>*

Because of the bad experiences the children had, they are easily frightened. The sound of heavy winds or dogs barking, especially at night, make the children gasp for air, and keep them up all night long. The children were having nightmares and were afraid to sleep because they feared that the remaining adults in their family would suddenly disappear.

The children often woke up at night, crying as they missed their caregivers, asking for those who were missing, and expressing fear of being left alone and abandoned. They often asked why people wanted to dismantle their family and why the police took away their loved ones one by one. When would their teachers/caregivers come back from jail? Being good children, are they too going to be sent to jail?



5 Chú Tiểu | NGHỆNG NGÀO ĐỨC TÂM BẬT KHÓC NƯỚC NỠ "CON SỢ 3 THẦY BỎ CON ĐI LUÔN RỒI KHÔNG CÒN VỀ NỮA!"

465,714 views • Jan 29, 2022

👍 20K 🗨 DISLIKE ➦ SHARE ⬇ DOWNLOAD ➦+ SAVE ...

*Child monk Đức Tâm (4) crying in the mid of the night, January 29, 2022*  
 Screenshot from video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QCejbV2Csw>

*"The situation at our Thiền Am (Shrine) is that we are being grossly persecuted. Seven of my family members are imprisoned for no valid reason: 4 men and 2 women over 60 and one old man over 90 (5 in prison, 2 held at home for being two old with one suffering stage 3 cancer). Currently, in my residence there were only women, one old man and ten children supporting each other to survive.*

*"Previously, women in my family were horrifically mistreated. 7, 8 women at my Shrine were beaten by them [the police], their fingernails broken by them, their heads repeatedly hit by them [the police] using their fists, and they received terrible threats. One woman among us was forcibly taken into a vehicle by a throng of police officers and driven to a certain hospital. She was forced to take off her clothes. They used their hands to squeeze her breasts multiple times, slid away her underwear and inserted something into her vagina. She was hurt and screamed many times, but they did not stop. She was very frightened and psychologically affected to this day. We are very scared. And now there is no one left in our family. We don't know where to get the money to care for these ten children." (Anna, August 14, 2022)*

TABBVT's main sources of income were their youtube channels and revenue earned from composing accompaniment for songs. Without their equipment and with many of their musically talented members in prison, TABBVT can no longer generate income to support these child monks. According to a lawyer representing TABBVT, there is an ongoing attempt to shut down

their youtube channels. This lawyer is working through an American citizen to protect these channels from being taken down by youtube at the request of Vietnamese authorities.

Some of the children are suffering chronic diseases. LTMT (2014) with anemia; LTPV (2015) with heart disease, and VTQP (2017) and LTPT (2015) with asthma. They need medication and frequent visits to doctors, which TABBVT can no longer afford. All children suffered from the same symptoms: gasping for air, wheezing, vomiting when seeing the green police uniforms.

Dr. Roy F. Smith, an American psychologist, assessed their conditions and stated that “it seems likely that the children are living under high stress conditions.”<sup>6</sup> From interviewing adults at the temple and reviewing of videos of the children, he believed that some of the children were experiencing symptoms including:

- Sleep disturbance (awakening during the night, nightmares and crying)
- Anxiety symptoms (fearfulness and worry)
- Sadness (crying and missing staff who are detained out of the home)
- Social changes (being less talkative and changes in play patterns)

On the basis of his remote and indirect assessment, Dr. Smith concluded:

*“There is significant risk that whatever symptoms (likely temporary) that the children have will at some point become more ingrained if they remain under high stress conditions. Again, the documentation of symptoms is suggestive versus conclusive, but even if only suggestive, this bears monitoring due to the psychological risks at stake. In the case of the TABBVT children, the risks are higher due to likely disruption within the family that would erode the children’s emotional support system, psychological parent figures being absent on detention, Master Le’s health declining, the children being out of the school setting, and likely community rejection.”<sup>7</sup>*



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<sup>6</sup> Roy F. Smith “Assessment of Possible Psychological Effects on the Monk Children (TABBVT) in Long An, Vietnam” April 10, 2022

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusions

Ten children, from 8 months to 8 years old, have been detrimentally impacted by the deconstruction of the only family they ever had. They are victims of the government's mistreatment of the TABBVT group. Responsible actors have grossly violated Vietnam's domestic laws and its international commitments by:

1. Allowing the Buddhist Church of Vietnam (BCV), a government-approved entity created in 1981 after the government outlawed the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) the same year, to infringe upon the freedom of religion or belief of TABBVT members – on many occasions, TABBVT already asserted that they were not part of BCV and did not intend to ever join BCV. Such infringement effectively denied opportunities for at least two TABBVT children from pursuing their musical aspirations.
2. Criminally prosecuting TABBVT on unfounded or outright false allegations made by BCV leaders: usurping the name of Buddha and practicing Buddhism without the blessing of BCV, taking advantage of children to profiteer, offending Buddha and distorting his teaching, and insulting a BCV monk by calling him “stupid as an ox” – expressing one's opinion is not a criminal offense.
3. Criminally prosecuting TABBVT for telling the truth, that the police abducted Ms. Diễm My and delivered her, an adult, to her parents against her will, and that the responsible authorities overlooked or covered up criminal acts committed to by scores of thugs led by Ms. Diễm My's father.
4. Failing to investigate allegations by Ms. Diễm My that her father sexually abused her, that the police of Đức Hoà District abducted her and delivered her back to her sexual abuser, and that her father led thugs to attack TABBVT members, seriously injuring one of them.
5. Failing to investigate and prosecute BCV monks for violating Vietnam's Law on Belief and Religion, which prohibits (Article 5): 1. Discriminating and stigmatizing people for beliefs or religions; 2. Forcing others to follow or not to follow, bribing others into following or not following, or hindering others in following or not following a belief or religion. The two said BCV leaders, one of them representing the BCV in Long An Province and the other serving on the Administrative Council of BCV, stigmatized TABBVT members for not practicing Buddhism as prescribed by BCV, and hindered them from practicing Buddhism according to their own belief.
6. Failing to investigate and prosecute member of the Public Security Office of Đức Hoà District and the Public Security Department of Long An Province for abduction, forcibly subjecting a female monk to gynecological examination against her will, conducting house search without a search warrant, overlooking and/or covering up the criminal activities of others, and employing torture and coercion during investigation, among others.

7. Failing to prosecute state-run media, Facebookers, bloggers, and BCV monks, among others, who falsely circulated allegations that the children at TABBVT were not orphans but born out of incestual relationships.

8. Failing to ensure compliance with Article 18 of the ICCPR, particularly to “*undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.*”

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted in their Vietnam Country Update of 2022 that there continues to be severe religious persecution in the country. The USCIRF continues to urge the U.S. government to engage with the Vietnamese government to push for meaningful, far-reaching, and sustainable progress. Similarly, the latest U.S. annual report on international religious freedom acknowledged the multiple restrictions against unregistered religious groups:

*“The Law on Belief and Religion (LBR) maintains a multistage registration and recognition process for religious groups. Some religious leaders, particularly those representing groups that either did not request or receive official recognition or certificates of registration, reported various forms of government harassment, including physical assaults, detentions, prosecutions, monitoring, and denials of, or no response to, requests for registration and other permissions. Some civil society organizations reported severe crackdowns on members of unregistered groups, particularly in the Central Highlands. Religious freedom activists said local authorities approved registration applications based more on religious groups’ perspective on politics than on religious doctrine.”*

The USCIRF have listed the six TABBVT members who have been sentenced to prison terms as victims of religious persecution: [Lê Tùng Vân](#), [Lê Thanh Trùng Dương](#), [Lê Thanh Hoàn Nguyễn](#), [Lê Thanh Nhật Nguyễn](#), [Cao Thị Cúc](#), and [Lê Thanh Nhi Nguyễn](#).

The government’s treatment of the children raised by the TABBVT group grossly violates many provisions of Vietnam’s Children Law, which was amended by its National Assembly in 2016 (102/2016/QH13):

- (a) Article 6: Prohibited Acts: Number 8: “Discriminate against children on the grounds of their personal characters, family background, sex, race, nationality, belief or religion.”
  - (i) Number 11: “Announce or disclose information about the privacy or secret of the child without the consent of the child who is at least 07 years old or older, or the consent of the child’s parent or guardian.”
  - (ii) Number 15: “Refuse, fail to perform or perform in an insufficient untimely manner the support, intervention or treatment for children who are threatened to be or in peril, and whose body, honor or dignity are harmed”
- (b) Article 7: Resources for ensuring the exercise of children’s rights and protecting children: Number 3: “ The Government shall provide human resource solutions and facilitate the exercise of children’s rights; develop networks of individuals who are charged with protecting children's rights at all levels, prioritize the arrangement of individuals in charge of child protection affairs at communal level and mobilize resources for

developing networks of freelancers in charge of protecting children at hamlets, villages, highland villages, mountainous villages, residential groups and quarters.”

- (c) Article 19: Right to freedom of belief or religion: “Children have the right to freedom of belief or religion. They may follow or reject to follow a given religion and their safety and interests thereof must be ensured and protected in the best way.”
- (d) Article 21: Right to privacy: Number 1: “Children have the imprescriptible right to privacy and keep personal and family secrets, all are for the best interests of children.
  - (i) Number 2: “Children have their honor, dignity, personal prestige, mail, telephone and telegram security and other personal information exchange types protected by the law. They are protected from and may resist illegal interventions against personal information.”
- (e) Article 42: Guarantee of the care of children:
  - (i) Number 1: “The Government shall implement support and assistance policies, and promulgates standards and regulations on the care of children according to the age level and those for disadvantaged children.”
  - (ii) Number 2: “The Government encourages agencies, organizations, families and individuals to support and take care of children and disadvantaged children. Organizations and individuals that provide care services to children shall enjoy support policies on land, taxes and credits.”
- (f) Article 70: Requirements on protection of children in the course of processing, taking of actions against administrative violations, rehabilitation/recovery and social inclusion:
  - (i) Number 2: “Cases relating to children affairs shall be promptly handled for minimizing mental and physical harm to children.”

Under Vietnam’s law:

- (b) A child is a human being below the age of 16.
- (c) “Disadvantaged children ” refer to those who are unable to exercise their rights to life, protection, nurture and education, and need special assistance and intervention from the Government, families and society so that they can live safely and fall in line with their families and the community.

## Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, we recommend the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to:

1. Request that the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam facilitate the assessment of the health, wellbeing and overall conditions of the ten child monks by independent, respectable health and mental health professionals, including those recommended or assigned by UNCRC.
2. Request that the stigmatizing implications of being accused of being born out of incestual relationships be fully addressed and resolved. Unless there is conclusive evidence, false allegations disseminated in the state-run media and social media, and accusations made by BCV clerics shall be formally cleared by competent authorities.
3. Work with other UN Mandate Holders, particularly the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the UN Committee on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to ensure that the Vietnamese authorities end its mistreatment and persecution against TABBVT, fully comply with its commitments to UN conventions, and respect due process and fairness in the enforcement of their national laws.
4. Heed the pleading of the children at TABBVT:

*“On behalf of the 30 members of the Meditation Shrine, we urge the 91ST SESSION of the COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD to help these ten very destitute children. Please help rescue the children's teachers so that they can go home, be with the children, so that they can make up for the suffering of the children for more than half a year! The children promise to live well, to become good and talented citizens, to devote all their talents to help our country and make the United Nations very proud. Please don't lose time. Please help the children today!”* See the full petition to UNCRC in Appendix B.

## APPENDIX A

1

### ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS ON THE MONK CHILDREN (TABBVV) IN LONG AN, VIETNAM

**DATE:** April 10, 2022

**EVALUATOR:** Roy F. Smith, Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, Psychologist  
(retired)

**PREFACE:** I am writing at the request of Tanya Nguyen-Do, who is making an effort to raise awareness of the plight of 9 adopted Monk children living at the Thien Tam Monastery (TABBVV) in LONG AN City, Vietnam. Given that my career was as a licensed Clinical Child Psychologist (now retired) who performed forensic evaluations under court order and testified in the courts of three states in the U.S.A. (Tennessee, Georgia and Wisconsin), Ms. Nguyen-Do asked me to review the documentation in the TABBVV case and offer an opinion about possible psychological damage to the children.

When assessing the available data and forming an opinion, I operated as closely as possible within the format of performing court-ordered evaluations in my career. The first step is detailing the complaint and the second is gathering as much independent, reliable documentation as is available. Unfortunately, however, the important third step of directly evaluating the children (with input from parents or parent figures) was not possible given the logistics involved. I've thus relied more heavily on the strongest documentation available about the conditions the children have reportedly been living under, along with descriptions of their behavior, to estimate the impact those conditions would be expected to have on children's emotional lives and development. In areas where independent documentation was not available, I used comparison to well-researched groups of children living under high-stress conditions.

**HISTORY AND COMPLAINT:** According to information provided by Ms. Nguyen-Do, an American citizen of Vietnamese heritage, 9 adopted children (5 boys and 4 girls), ages 8 months to 7 years, live at the TABBVV temple in LONG AN City. They are being raised there by 6 nuns and the grand Master, Le Tung Van (age 92). Also living in the temple are 5 young male adult masters in training (who are also involved with the children's upbringing), along with 2 mentally challenged women (ages 29 and 36), 6 elderly women in charge of nutrition, and a 7-month old recently adopted orphan who does not yet have a birth certificate.

Ms. Nguyen-Do alleges that for the past 3 years the temple inhabitants have been persecuted and harassed by the Vietnamese government due to not being sanctioned by the official Vietnamese Buddhist Association. This mistreatment has consisted of the temple being raided, personnel being physically assaulted, and personnel being arrested and detained without due process. She further alleges that one nun was sexually assaulted while being detained for investigation, that staff was physically forced to sign papers they had not read (with fingers and hands injured in the process), and that blood was drawn from some staff against their will. She

states that these incidents (described in more detail below) were carried out in a violent and angry manner, and that they were often witnessed by the children.

Ms. Nguyen-Do further states that in July of 2020 the temple was attacked by roughly 50 trespassers. During this event the temple was robbed and one of the young masters in training was hit in the face with a brick, causing serious injury. TABBVT members filed a formal complaint about the trespassing and injury, but the case was later dismissed by authorities with no explanation.

Additionally, Ms. Nguyen-Do alleges that the government claims that the births of these 9 Monk children actually resulted from sexual activity between Master Le and one or more of the nuns, which they deny. She notes that in 2020, related to the government's claim, the state run media (presumably with government support or control) used the internet extensively to promote the idea that the temple inhabitants are the "incest family" (a highly significant taboo in Buddhism). A related incident was that the 30 temple members were at one point asked to sit in a bus for 3 hours on a hot day without air conditioning or ventilation (windows closed), and that the members were not provided any food or water when requested. Ms. Nguyen-Do alleges that the purpose of this was to raise their body temperatures, thus giving the appearance of having COVID-19. They were then transported to a quarantine center and detained 14 days, during which time blood was withdrawn against their wills (instead of the usual nose swipe test for COVID-19) and they were forced to sign papers without reading them. Ms. Nguyen-Do states that while this highly stressful incident was purportedly carried out to do COVID-19 testing, its true purpose was to perform blood tests to establish that Master Le and the nuns were the children's biological parents. However, to date the government has not presented any evidence supporting this claim.

The media's accusation of the temple inhabitants being the "incest family", possibly combined with the above testing incident, then allegedly got picked up by children in the public school that the Monk children attended. They were then reportedly teased and harassed about it. This harassment resulted in Master Le's decision to have the children withdrawn from school for their protection, and they have been home-schooled ever since.

Ms. Nguyen-Do further asserts that Master Le has been on house arrest the past 2-3 months (versus detention due to serious health issues). She also states that the police have detained three of the masters in training (detained in jail), and that the children and staff are not permitted to visit them.

The final concern noted by Ms. Nguyen-Do is that a significant fund of money had been accumulated by the temple through videos produced using the children's talents and the young masters' gift of music, and that these funds were to be used to build a new temple as the current one has major structural problems. She states, however, that on 1/4/22, roughly 300 police officers raided the temple without a subpoena and took the funds without providing any

documentation of having confiscated them. Thus new construction has halted and the children's current residence has problems with water leakage and excessive heat.

Overall, therefore, Ms. Nguyen-Do is alleging that the children have been, and are still, living in a temple based extended family unit that is being subjected to persecution, harassment and abuse by government, police and the media. She further alleges that, as a result of this situation, the children are experiencing psychological trauma that is damaging their moods and personalities. It is in this context that Ms. Nguyen-Do, through a mutual acquaintance, asked me to review this case and determine (if possible) whether there are actual signs of psychological damage. Then, if damage is apparent, I was asked to make reasonable predictions about how this damage might affect the children going forward.

**Finally, as a note to the reader:** I am fully aware that Ms. Nguyen-Do is actively pursuing legal assistance through the temple's attorneys in Vietnam, along with the U.S. State Dept. and various United Nations offices, to gain refugee status for the 9 adopted children as well as the remaining 21 people living at the temple. If refugee status is obtained, her goal is to then work toward their being relocated to the United States or some other country not subject to religious persecution. In the meantime, the temple's attorneys are working on their behalf to file complaints with government offices in Vietnam to address the alleged persecution and harassment, along with the detention of the 3 masters in training.

## **DOCUMENTS REVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT**

1. Letter to Officer Damerg-Ott at the U.S. Consulate's Office in Vietnam, written by Le Thanh Nhi Nguyen-a master in training under Master Le Tung Van, dated 3/2/2022 and translated into English by Tanya Nguyen-Do.; and added correspondence dated 4/1/2022
2. Letter from Ms. Nguyen-Do to UNCIRF officials, dated 2/8/22
3. Emails between UNHCR office and Ms. Nguyen-Do, dated 2/8/2022 and 4/4/2022
4. Emails between U.S. Consulate Office and Ms. Nguyen-Do, dated 4/6/2022
5. Emails with U.S. Representative Greg Steuben's Office, dated 4/1/2022
6. Video labeled "50 People Attacked TA Monastery causing Injuries 2019", (event actually occurred in July of 2020 per Ms. Nguyen-Do)
7. Audio-visual recording from Utube, in Vietnamese, dated 2/1/2022, showing 8 children lying on beds apparently at bedtime, with one staff talking in a reassuring manner to a tearful and distressed roughly 6 year old child. Of the remaining children, 4 were notably fidgety and repositioning themselves while trying unsuccessfully to get comfortable.
8. 6 photos of a male striking at a building with a long, slender object (possibly machete), and 3 photos of tears on an inside metal surfaces- pictures dated 10/28/2021
9. Picture of a young male lying in bed with a bandage over his right eye and cheek, and stream of blood running down his neck-reportedly had been hit in the face with a brick during an invasion by trespassers-this event reportedly occurred in 2019.

10. 1 hour of video of the children performing on Utube, and 1.5 hours of them in normal daily life.
11. This examiner viewed at least 35 other documents, photos, emails, etc. However, these were not usable due to being in the Vietnamese language.

## PROFESSIONAL ARTICLES REVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT

(Listed at the end of the report)

## ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS BASED ON REVIEW OF THE DOCUMENTS

1. Available documentation suggests at least a **significant possibility of harassment or persecution**, violent entry into the temple, and physical confrontation of at least some of the adults. The descriptions provided by Ms. Nguyen-Do, along with pictures and videos, are highly consistent with what articles by independent international organizations state about religious persecution in Vietnam. Thus, it seems **likely that the children are living under high stress conditions**.
2. There is a **high likelihood that the TABBVT children view Master Le, the nuns and the masters in training as their “psychological parents”**. For psychologists, identifying who a child views as their “psychological parents” is even more important than knowing who their biological parents are. The psychological parents are those adults who provide love, security, stability, protection, support and guidance. These “parents” provide the social-emotional “soil” that a child is rooted into for security and nurturance, as well as providing the guidance and support that parallels a plant being watered, given sunlight, and provided nutrients as needed to thrive. Since the TABBVT children view Master Le, the nuns and the masters in training as their psychological parents, any threat or harm to those “parents” becomes a threat to their base of safety, security and nurturing. A threatening atmosphere, physical confrontation of the parents, and/or removal of the parents would create significant anxiety, fear and loss in the children (who would feel helpless) and the young masters (who would likely feel guilt from inability to physically protect the others). Additionally, the Monk children have now witnessed the pinnacle of their security (Master Le) as being powerless to stop traumatic events from occurring. Thus the base of their security is no longer secure for them, and I would expect this situation to produce significant apprehension and insecurity. These negative effects are heightened by 3 of the masters in training still being out of the home on detention and the children being unable to visit them.
3. **Documentation** (by adults at the temple, and videos) **suggests that at least some of the children are experiencing symptoms which include:**
  - Sleep disturbance (awakening during the night, nightmares and crying)
  - Anxiety symptoms (fearfulness and worry)

Sadness (crying and missing staff who are detained out of the home)  
 Social changes (being less talkative and changes in play patterns).

In general, the above descriptions of the children's emotional reactions are highly consistent with research on how children react in situations characterized by high anxiety, anger, unpredictability and loss. Also, children in these types of situations often show decreased concentration, along with deterioration in their school work (though no documentation about this was presented for the Monk children).

4. I was **unable to obtain documentation on the children being called "incest family" at school**. This doesn't mean it didn't occur-just that I saw no documentation of it. I can say though, that **if** this name-calling/labeling did occur and thus led to the Monk children being withdrawn from school, then this separation from their peer group would have two predictable impacts. First, it would separate them from normal peer interaction that is an important venue for learning social skills needed to function effectively in society (skills such as forming friendships, problem-solving, sharing, learning to relate to a variety of personalities, etc.).

Second, this separation would remove the children from learning roles, developing and affirming competencies, and achieving status in the peer group as their personalities develop. Thus, they would be deprived of an important source of validation as their positive features emerge (e.g. friendliness, talent, compassion, athleticism, intelligence, humor, etc.). Typically, as these features emerge, they consolidate into components of a child's self-concept, and those features then provide self-esteem for the child. The Monk children now primarily have each other as their sole peer group, and while this may be supportive as far as it goes, that peer group is not representative of the Vietnamese culture and social world.

5. There is **significant risk that whatever symptoms (likely temporary) that the children have will at some point become more ingrained if they remain under high stress conditions**. Again, the documentation of symptoms is suggestive versus conclusive, but even if only suggestive, this bears monitoring due to the psychological risks at stake. In the case of the TABBVT children, the risks are higher due to likely disruption within the family that would erode the children's emotional support system, 3 psychological parent figures being absent on detention, Master Le's health declining, the children being out of the school setting, and likely community rejection.
6. If the temple's attorneys in Vietnam, the U.S. State Dept., and the UN agencies can substantiate Ms. Nguyen-Do's assertions on persecution and harassment of TABBVT, then this finding would underscore both the current emotional costs and the risk of future emotional damage to the children. This would likely also heighten the possibility that the

children's temporary isolation within the temple could become a permanent walling off from the larger society as their need for self-protection becomes entrenched.

7. There is the question of how long children (in general) have to live in a threatening, high-stress situation before short-term "reactive symptoms" become long-term "internalized, highly ingrained patterns". Research on this shows two major findings. First, many children, with proper emotional support, are able to "bounce back" once removed from high-stress conditions if these are shorter term in nature. Secondly, however, individual differences (innate genetic patterns) can have a significant impact on how resilient a child is in coping with the high stress conditions. Thus some children will be more impacted than others despite the support given. From the history obtained and documentation collected on the Monk children, my impression is that this case would fall into the short-term category at present. However, time is of the essence in trying to get this matter resolved on behalf of the children's futures.
8. Finally, while this report pertains to the 9 adopted Monk children living at the temple, there are questions regarding the other 21 people also living there. While this examiner did not focus on these people in this assessment, two comments are worth noting:
  - a. It is likely that a good number of these people provide psychological parenting roles for the children. This is especially so given the traditional cohesiveness and extended family concept within Vietnamese culture. The nuns would be expected to have nurturing roles with the children, and the masters in training, though lacking the prestige that comes with age, are likely to have patriarchal features in the children's eyes due to being male extensions of Master Le. Consequently, the children probably view many of these 21 people as the social-emotional family unit that meets their needs. Thus, it would likely benefit the children for most, if not all of these adults, to remain with the children.
  - b. If persecution and harassment are indeed occurring toward the inhabitants at the temple, then it is reasonable to assume that the adults would also experience negative emotional effects from this. One has only to view the video labeled "50 People Attacked TA Monastery causing injuries 2019" to get a sense of what the adults have also been subjected to.

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Roy F. Smith Ph.D.

4/10/2022

Roy F. Smith, Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology  
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Date Signed

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Testimony of Anna, an orphan adopted by TABBVT**

My name is Anna. I represent 30 members of the Meditation Shrine on the Edge of the Universe (Thiền Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ - TABBVT). Our best wishes to you for health and happiness.

I would like to share with you what has been burdening my heart.

The peaceful and happy days of the children we raised suddenly collapsed in an instant when everything fell apart, and the dreams and ambitions that the children cherished went up in smoke on 1 April, 2022.

On the morning of 1 April 2022, the children's teachers had arranged the schedules for the children very well. They will learn to sing, play the piano, arrange tables, chairs, pens, etc. and draw pictures, and activities to allow the children to create, put their dreams on paper, communicate the things that they enjoy doing and would like to do. But on that day, out of nowhere, hundreds of police officers, including riot police armed with guns and other weapons came. They confiscated all our phones, laptops - computers, other electronics, and personal belongings without leaving any receipt. It is worth mentioning here that they did not enter through the main door, but sneaked into our house through the back door. When we asked the police to issue a paper search warrant, they did not show us any document. The hundred or more police officers who stormed our place did so unlawfully. They forced us to sign and deposit our fingerprints on some unknown papers.

When we didn't comply, the police pressed our heads down on the table, holding our hands to force us to sign the papers. And yet, the police officers blatantly entered my Grandmaster's room (he was 92 years old), blatantly robbed the huge amount of money that my master had saved for a lifetime. My master worked hard all his life - selling incense, fish, and the like to earn it. That is the amount of money we planned to use to rebuild the house to protect the children from rain and sun (the house is in terrible condition and some walls may collapse any time). But then we were blatantly robbed by the police, we lost all that money. At that time, that money was the only asset we had to buy rice and milk for the children. After that money was gone, we were completely devastated.

My close associates in the meditation shrine were taken away suddenly, and all our money was also taken. There were only women, the elderly and 10 small children left behind. We don't know where to get the money to buy milk and diapers for 10 babies. In the days that followed, we struggled to get every drop of milk, every grain of rice in trying to give the children the most complete meals possible. In our house at that time, there were many security cameras (16), which could have been the sources of the important evidence we could use to sue them. But the police were prepared: they disabled all electrical equipment in our house, disconnected all the cameras and the modem that stored data in our house, making it impossible for us to record or receive anything. More importantly, they caused interference to our cellular coverage, making it impossible for us to contact anyone outside to ask for help. The children at that time were extremely scared, cried bitterly because they wanted to be with the teachers,

but at that time the police ordered each of us to sit still in different places in the house, and the children since then have not seen their arrested teachers. The children sat huddled in a corner, all traumatized. The teachers were dragged into police vehicles by the police after that.

That time was very bad for the children, and from then on they only knew pain and tears. The teachers were not only teachers, not only educators, but also parents who sacrificed, used all their love to protect the children to encourage them. The children chased their dreams, had fun with them every day, and also were trained to become stronger mentally and physically. But now there is no one left. Then what will the children's future be like without teachers by their side? Who will be with the children when they are sad? Who will be loving enough like the teachers to guide the children's first steps in life?

The desperate situation arising from the police raid will greatly affect the children's long-term psychological development and prevent them from being happy and confident. The bare minimum of rights of the children at TABBVT need to be protected just like for the other children all over the world.

What the children miss everyday is:

1. No teacher, no education (the arrested teachers had always been the ones to directly teach children)
2. No income. No one to provide for the children.
3. Lack of physical and mental care
4. No one to love the children, a most important need.
5. Lack of spiritual and ethical education (the teachers held meditation classes every night, and every day they held classes for children to study the Taoist Way)
  - A. Lessons on humanism
  - B. Lessons on religion (Buddhism, etc.)
  - C. Lack of lectures on Dharma teachings
  - D. Lack of yoga practice
6. Lack of training in music, drama, piano, dance, singing, painting, etc.
7. Lack of practice hours in physical and mental development such as chess, math, rubik cube.
8. Lack of teaching about maintaining order, safety, and discipline; lack of practice hours in emotional development such as stories, lessons about love.
9. Lack of lessons on great achievers, famous examples of religious and social achievements, examples of virtue and kindness, etc.

We feel very sad when the children who were bouncing around and having fun, have now become the little ones who talk less, show less affection, communicate less, and laugh less.

On behalf of the 30 members of the Meditation Shrine, we urge the 91ST SESSION of the COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD to help these ten very destitute children. Please help rescue the children's teachers so that they can go home, be with the children, so that they can make up for the suffering of the children for more than half a year! The children promise to live well, to become good and talented citizens, to devote all their talents to help our country

and make the United Nations very proud. Please don't lose time. Please help the children today!

We are grateful.

Anna (TABBVT)

8/14/2022  
91ST SESSION COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD  
Palais Wilson  
Geneva, Switzerland  
Kính gửi : UNCRC

Tôi là Anna. Tôi xin được phép đại diện cho 30 thành viên trong Thiên Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ gửi lời chúc sức khỏe và hạnh phúc nhất đến với các bạn!

Tôi xin có một vài tâm sự được ẩn giấu trong lòng từ rất lâu chia sẻ với các bạn!

Những ngày tháng bình yên hạnh phúc của các bé bắt ngờ sụp đổ trong tích tắc, mọi thứ tan tành, những giấc mơ, những hoài bão mà các bé ấp ủ nay đã theo mây theo khói, đã không còn là gì nữa sau ngày 01-04-2022.

Một buổi sáng vào ngày 01-04-2022. Trước đó, mấy thầy của các bé đã sắp xếp những lịch trình cho các bé rất đầy đủ. Nào là hôm nay sẽ học hát, hôm nay sẽ dạy các bé đàn, sẽ bày ra nào là bàn ghế bút vẽ tranh ảnh các thứ để các bé thoải thích sáng tạo, thoải thích vẽ những ước mơ, những điều mà sau này các em muốn thực hiện ... (tất cả đều được chuẩn bị). Thế nhưng vào ngày hôm đó bắt ngờ từ đâu mà cả hàng trăm công an, hàng trăm cảnh sát cơ động mang theo súng ống vũ khí xông vào nơi ở chúng tôi. Tịch thu tất cả điện thoại, laptop - vi tính máy móc điện tử và các đồ dùng cá nhân của chúng tôi mà không hề có bất cứ 1 biên bản nào. Điều đáng nói ở đây bọn họ đã không đi vào bằng cửa chính mà đã LÉN LÚT xông vào nhà chúng tôi bằng cửa sau. Khi chúng tôi yêu cầu cơ quan công an đưa ra tờ giấy "lệnh khám xét" nhà thì bọn họ hoàn toàn không hề đưa ra được bất kỳ một mảnh giấy nào. Tất cả hơn mấy trăm công an xông vào nơi ở tôi khi đó là hoàn toàn BẤT HỢP PHÁP. Bọn họ bắt ép chúng tôi ký tên và lăn tay vào những tờ giấy gì đó không rõ. Chúng tôi không đồng ý thì công an bọn họ đè đầu chúng tôi xuống bàn, tự ý cầm tay tôi lên để ép tôi ký cho được những tờ giấy đó. Chưa hết, bọn công an đã ngang nhiên vào phòng sư phụ tôi (92 tuổi), ngang nhiên CUỐP đi số tiền khổng lồ mà sư phụ tôi đã dành dụm 1 đời để có được. Đây là số tiền mà ngày xưa sư phụ tôi đã vất vả đi bán nhang, vất vả đi bán cá để có nó. Đó là số tiền chúng tôi dự định xây lại căn nhà để tránh mưa tránh nắng cho các bé (căn nhà hiện tại chúng tôi đang ở đã mục nát, có thể đổ sập bức tường bất cứ lúc nào). Nhưng rồi chúng tôi đã bị công an ĂN CUỐP trắng trợn, chúng tôi đã mất toàn bộ số tiền đó. Thời điểm đó số tiền ấy là tài sản duy nhất chúng tôi có để mua gạo mua sữa cho các bé. Sau khi số tiền đó mất đi, chúng tôi hoàn toàn sụp đổ.

Người thân của tôi đã bị bắt đi đột ngột, tiền trong nhà tôi cũng bị cướp mất. Trong nhà chúng tôi lúc đó chỉ còn lại phụ nữ, người già và 10 đứa bé nhỏ. Chúng tôi chẳng biết kiếm đâu ra tiền mua sữa mua tã cho 10 đứa bé. Những ngày tháng sau đó chúng tôi đã phải chật vật để kiếm từng giọt sữa, từng hạt gạo, chúng tôi cố gắng cho mấy bé những bữa ăn trọn vẹn nhất có thể. Trong nhà chúng tôi khi đó có lắp rất nhiều thiết bị Camera (16 cái), đáng lẽ ra đó sẽ là tất cả bằng chứng thu lại được vô cùng quan trọng để chúng tôi có thể kiện lại bọn chúng. Nhưng sao có thể ngờ trước được khi bọn họ xông vào đã chuẩn bị từ trước rất kỹ lưỡng. Công an bọn họ đã ngắt toàn bộ thiết bị điện trong nhà chúng tôi, đã ngắt toàn bộ thiết bị Camera và đã lấy đi cục modem lưu trữ dữ liệu trong nhà chúng tôi khiến chúng tôi chẳng thể ghi hình hay thu được bất cứ thứ gì làm bằng chứng. Đáng nói hơn là bọn họ đã ngắt luôn sóng điện thoại khiến chúng tôi không thể liên lạc được ra bên ngoài cầu cứu. Các bé nhỏ trong lúc đó đã vô cùng hoảng sợ, đã khóc lóc thảm thiết vì muốn được bên cạnh mấy thầy mấy cô, nhưng lúc đó bọn họ cho mỗi người ngồi 1 nơi và mấy bé từ lúc đó đã không còn nhìn thấy mặt mấy thầy thêm 1 lần nào nữa. Các bé ngồi co ro 1 góc với đôi mắt thất thần. Mấy thầy cũng bị công an lôi lên xe sau đó.

Khoảng thời gian ấy đối với các bé vô cùng tồi tệ, chỉ còn lại đau thương và nước mắt! Máy thầy đối với các bé không chỉ là những người thầy, không chỉ dạy dỗ về học vấn, mà còn là người cha người mẹ đã hy sinh, đã dùng hết tất cả tình thương mình có mà bảo vệ các bé, đã khuyến khích các bé theo đuổi ước mơ, đã cùng các bé vui đùa mỗi ngày và cũng đã ngày ngày rèn luyện cho các bé trở nên cứng cáp hơn từ tinh thần lẫn cả thể xác! Vậy mà giờ đây người đầu chẳng thấy, chỉ còn lại đau thương bao trùm căn nhà chúng tôi! Rồi sau này tương lai các bé sẽ thế nào khi không có các thầy bên cạnh? Ai sẽ bên cạnh các bé khi các bé buồn? Ai sẽ đủ tình thương như máy thầy để dìu dắt từng bước đi đầu đời của các bé?

Sự thiếu thốn quan trọng này sẽ ảnh hưởng cực kỳ lớn trong sự tiến triển về Tâm Lý đường dài của các bé và sẽ mất đi cơ hội để các bé trở thành một em bé hồn nhiên và tự tin. Trong khi đây là những quyền lợi tối thiểu nhất mà những em bé ở Thiền Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ (TABBT) cần được bảo vệ giống như các trẻ em trên thế giới đang được bảo vệ!

Sau đây tôi sẽ liệt kê ra những cái “THIỆU” mà các bé đang từng ngày mong chờ trong vô vọng!

1. Thiếu sự dạy dỗ của các thầy (từ trước đến nay các thầy luôn là người trực tiếp dạy dỗ các bé)
2. Thiếu người làm ra tiền, thiếu tài chính.
3. Thiếu sự săn sóc về vật chất lẫn tinh thần
4. QUAN TRỌNG là THIẾU TÌNH THƯƠNG
5. Thiếu sự dạy dỗ về đạo đức (đêm nào các thầy cũng tổ chức những khóa thiền, và ngày nào cũng dành riêng cho các bé những giờ học Đạo)
  - A. Những giờ học về đạo làm người
  - B. Những giờ học về đạo theo tôn giáo (đạo Phật ...)
  - C. Thiếu các buổi học về thuyết pháp
  - D. Thiếu những giờ thực tập về yoga
6. Thiếu những tài năng về âm nhạc, diễn kịch, đàn, múa, hát, vẽ tranh...
7. Thiếu những giờ thực tập về thể dục và thể trí như võ thuật, cờ tướng, rubik ...
8. Thiếu người chăm sóc về trật tự, an toàn và kỷ luật cho các bé. Thiếu những giờ thực tập về thể dục, thể trí, thể tình cảm ...
  - Thể dục như học võ, cầu lông, bóng rổ ...
  - Thể trí như cờ tướng, toán học, rubik ...
  - Thể tình cảm như những câu chuyện, những bài học về tình thương...
9. Thiếu những giờ học về những gương doanh nhân, những tấm gương lừng danh về tôn giáo, xã hội, những tấm gương về Đức Độ ....

Chúng tôi rất buồn khi những đứa trẻ tung tăng vui đùa ngày nào mà giờ đây trở thành những đứa bé ít nói, ít thể hiện tình cảm, ít giao lưu, ít cười đùa như xưa rất nhiều!

Chúng tôi tất cả thành viên 30 người trong Thiền Am cầu xin 91ST SESSION COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD hãy giúp đỡ cho 10 em bé đang rất cô đơn này. Xin hãy cứu các thầy của máy bé được TỰ DO để máy thầy có thể về nhà, về bên cạnh các bé, để có thể bù đắp sự THIẾU THÓN về TÌNH THƯƠNG NGHIỆM TRỌNG mà các bé đã phải đắng cay chịu đựng suốt hơn nửa năm qua! Các bé hứa sẽ sống thật tử tế, sẽ trở thành những người công dân thật tốt trong xã hội, sẽ thật tài giỏi để cống hiến hết tài năng mình có cho đất nước, sẽ làm cho HỘI LIÊN HIỆP QUỐC vô cùng tự hào vì đã không phí công sức khi ngày hôm nay giúp đỡ các bé!

Xin cảm ơn và rất trân trọng!  
Anna (TABBVTT)