



September 18, 2015

His Excellency Nguyen Tan Dung
Prime Minister
Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Hanoi, Vietnam

Dear Prime Minister Dung:

As the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, we write as a network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious and geographical backgrounds to express grave concerns about limitations on freedom of religion or belief in your country and discrimination against religious minorities.

During the last 40 years, Vietnam has made notable strides to improve the conditions for human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief. These improvements reflect the vast diversity of religious communities present in Vietnam and the relative harmony with which they coexist with one another. Some religious communities experience few restrictions on the practice of their faith. Others, however, continue to face harassment, intimidation, or beatings because of their religion, and oppressive registration policies and clauses such as Ordinance 21 and Decree 92 provided in the 2013 Constitution broadly restrict rather than protect their freedom of religion or belief. In addition, a concerning number of faith believers have been jailed for peacefully expressing their faith and beliefs, like Father Nguyen Van Ly, the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do and Van Minh Nguyen, amongst others. Vietnam's religious life and diversity is a reality, and today the freedom and exercise of religious belief remains unsafe and contrary to the United Nation's Universal Declaration for Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We are aware your government is currently drafting new legal provisions on religion. Based on a draft that is publicly available, we are especially concerned about a bill that would further regulate, restrict, limit, and forbid the exercise of religion or belief of Vietnam's numerous faith groups. This legal framework would create a great disadvantage for new religious organizations and those of ethnic groups such as the Kinh and Montagnards, and religious groups like independent Buddhist communities and the Hoa Hao. This would leave those who choose to maintain their independence with no legal means to do so, making their peaceful religious activities "illegal" under the law. Furthermore, a law that requires multiple layers of government approvals and notifications for religious activities, personnel, and curriculum significantly impedes the right of individuals to freely practice their faith.

We understand your government has solicited some public comment, but we strongly encourage you to seek out more substantive feedback, and work in partnership with a wide range of religious communities, particularly the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. As this legislation is considered by the National Assembly, we respectfully urge you, especially as a State member of the UN Human Rights Council, to ensure that the final text is in line with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and eliminates burdensome registration requirements.

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Mr. Prime Minister, we encourage your government to demonstrate its commitment to freedom of religion or belief by upholding the internationally agreed standards to which Vietnam is already a party. We respectfully urge you to end tight governmental control and harassment of unregistered groups, release all prisoners jailed for practicing their religion or belief, and take steps to bring the draft law on religion into conformity with international standards.

Sincerely,

Baroness Elizabeth Berridge
United Kingdom
IPP Steering Committee

David Anderson, MP
Canada
IPP Steering Committee

Abid Raja, MP
Norway
IPP Steering Committee

Leonardo Quintao, MP
Brazil
IPP Steering Committee

Senad Sepic, MP
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mario Redondo Poveda, MP
Costa Rica

Son Chhay, MP
Cambodia

Gonzalo Ramirez Zamora, MP
Costa Rica

Leon Benoit, MP
Canada

Senator Ehab El Kharrat
Egypt

Russ Hiebert, MP
Canada

Bonner Francisco Jimenez Beloso, MP
El Salvador

James Lunney, MP
Canada

Peter van Dalen, MEP
European Parliament

Senator Thanh Hai Ngo
Canada

Chiora Taktakishvili, MP
Georgia

Lucien Yaliki, MP
Central African Republic

Zurab Japaridze, MP
Georgia

Ammo Aziza Baroud, MP
Chad

Steffen Bilger, MP
Germany

Mamadi Moussa Mamadi, MP
Chad

Frank Heinrich, MP
Germany

Jorge Rathgeb, MP
Chile

Heribert Hirte, MP
Germany

Volker Kauder, MP
Germany

Jessie Kabwila, MP
Malawi

Volkmar Klein, MP
Germany

Doi Bu, MP
Myanmar

Claudia Lückling-Michel, MP
Germany

Shwe Maung, MP
Myanmar

Karl Schieverling, MP
Germany

Kasthuri Patto, MP
Malaysia

Johannes Singhammer
Germany

Charles Santiago, MP
Malaysia

Walter Banegas, MP
Honduras

Rodrigo Ivan Cortes Jimenez, MP
Mexico

Satya Pal Singh, MP
India

Ruard Ganzevoort, MP
Netherlands

Mohammedali Yaseen Taha, MP
Iraq

Sokonte Davies, MP
Nigeria

Yoav Kisch, MP
Israel

Sylvi Graham, MP
Norway

Marina Berlinghieri, MP
Italy

Marit Nybakk, MP
Norway

Ernesto Preziosi, MP
Italy

Arifa Khalid, MP
Pakistan

Mohammed Al-Alwan, MP
Jordan

Assiya Nasir, MP
Pakistan

Abdallah Khawaldeh, MP
Jordan

José María Ibañez, MP
Paraguay

Jude Njomo, MP
Kenya

Julio Pablo Rosas Huaranga, MP
Peru

Ghassan Moukheiber, MP
Lebanon

Elene Marie Ndionetine, MP
Senegal

Mantas Adomenas, MP
Lithuania

Cherylyn Dudley, MP
South Africa

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Nqabayomzi Kwankwa, MP
South Africa

Mohamed Ali Mohamed Adam Nimer, MP
Sudan

Yu Mei-Nu, MP
Taiwan

Bochra Bel Haj Hmida, MP
Tunisia

Mehrezia Labidi-Maiza, MP
Tunisia

Lord David Alton
United Kingdom

Bishop Nick Baines
United Kingdom

Diane Dodds, MP
United Kingdom

Jim Shannon, MP
United Kingdom

Stephen Timms, MP
United Kingdom

Gerardo Amarillo, MP
Uruguay