

# IPPFoRB

International Panel of Parliamentarians  
for Freedom of Religion or Belief

14 September 2016

His Excellency Nguyễn Xuân Phúc  
Prime Minister  
Socialist Republic of Vietnam  
Hanoi, Vietnam

Dear Prime Minister Phúc:

We write as a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds, committed to the promotion and protection of the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief for all people. In September 2015, we wrote to your predecessor about limitations on religious freedom and discrimination against religious minorities in your country. We respectfully appeal to you again with the same message.

Vietnam has made laudable progress to improve human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. Today, many individuals and religious communities are able to practice their faith freely, openly, and without fear. Unfortunately, however, many others still cannot do so, because they are either restricted in the practice of their faith or subjected to harassment, detention, or physical violence. We continue to receive reports that local authorities in some areas single out religious organizations that do not have government recognition. We also hear that some local government officials threaten religious followers with eviction from or demolition of their places of worship and other religious buildings. Lastly, we are concerned about the individuals detained, arrested, or imprisoned due to their religious beliefs or religious freedom advocacy, often on unrelated charges (such as through Article 258 of the Criminal Code).

The religion law your government is drafting is an opportunity to address these concerns. Mandatory, onerous registration requirements disadvantage many religious organizations, particularly those largely comprised of ethnic minorities and those who prefer to remain independent from the government. Importantly, these measures contravene Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international standards.

International legal experts believe the draft would be improved if provisions: 1) move away from an approval-based system and towards a notification-based system, in which religious groups would be required only to provide notification of an activity (religious meetings,

ceremonies, etc.) to government officials; 2) confirm that failure by the government to respond to applications for registration or activities by the deadline constitutes approval; 3) allow unregistered religious organizations to worship in private; 4) clarify that any facility, public or private, to which individuals have legal access, can be considered a legal location to practice religion; and 5) offer legal personality to religious groups so desiring.

Prime Minister Phúc, under your leadership Vietnam has the opportunity to demonstrate the seriousness of its commitment to the inherent right to freedom of religion or belief. Doing so would send a clear signal around the world about your country's respect for genuine human rights. We respectfully and strongly encourage you to end the harassment of unregistered and independent religious groups, remove notices of eviction or demolition on religious buildings, release unconditionally religious detainees and prisoners, and ensure the religion law conforms with international standards and Vietnam's constitution.

Sincerely,

*The following parliamentarians support this advocacy letter in their personal capacity and not as representatives of their government, political party or any other body*

Benedy (UK)

Bonner Jimenez (SV)

Malay Patillo (HN)

Cheylyn Jucsey (SA)

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ (CAN)

Anilcon Pop (Guatemala)

EVA SINDARI (INDONESIA)

José A. Vazquez Hombueas

Mareend Singh (SA)

\_\_\_\_\_ (CAN)

\_\_\_\_\_ (MACEDONIA)

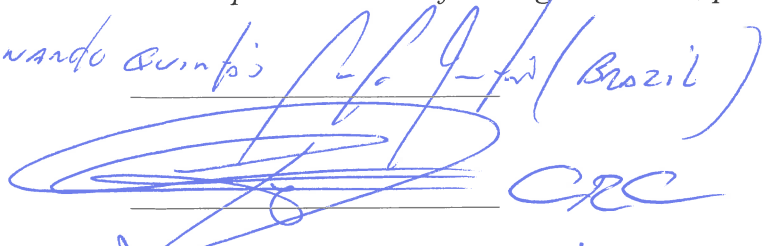
David Olosho (ROM)


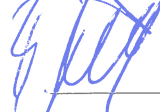
Radu Trușcă (ROM)

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Dr. JAMEELA AL-SAMMAR BAHRAIN.

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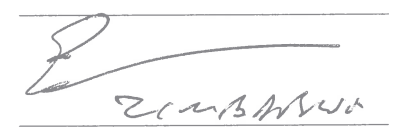
Leonardo Quintis (Brazil)  
  
CRC

 H Pakistan  
 (MACEDONIA)

Selime Öpçen (Turkey)  
Nitha Nair (UK)

Vasanth Senanayake (Sri Lanka)  
Ana Gabriela Fermin  
Rep. Dominicana

Dr. JAMEOLA A-SAMMAM  
BAHRAIN.

  
ZIMBABWE

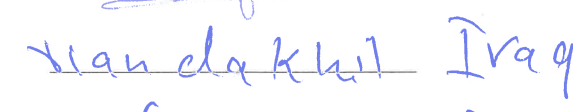
Angel Alvarado (Venezuela)

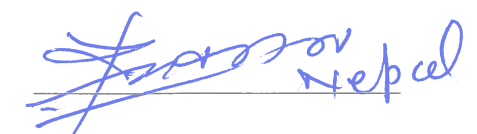
Kazem Kheir (Lebanon)

VEION BERISAE KOSOVO



 (Malaysia)

 Iraq


 Nepal

Wady Botto (Dom. Rep.)

Viktor Yelensky  
(Ukraine)

Udeh Bages (ANGOLA)

Suzza Yap (Philippines)

 Shwe Maung  
(Myanmar)

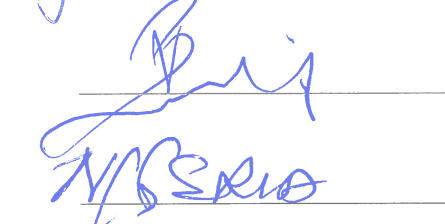
KASTHURI PATTO (MALAYSIA)


BAROUD (CHAD)

Sofia Pofinik, Missonguela  
ANGOLA

R SHARR (LEBANON)

João Kanda Bernardo

  
MOROCCO

ELATRI KHADIJA  
 Morocco

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ABD RAZA ~~Adiga~~ (NORWAY)

MARIO REDONDO (C.R.)

~~Sam~~ NIGERIA

ZUBEDA HASSAN SAKURU (TANZANIA)

Zassan Dauri

Daniel Tost Johansen (Denmark)

FRANK HEINRICH (GERMANY)

Delia

Dr. Eugenio Cedeño

Dominican Republic

Hon. Sarah Adwoa Safo (Ghana) ~~Adwoa~~

Heinrich KSB (GERMANY)

Volker Wende

Benedict (UK)

~~Ab~~ Hon Etienne TIME Senegal

Ngabayanzi Kawukwa (South Africa)