

# briefing

## Vietnam

*Analysis:*

*2008 Internal 'Training Manual for the Task Concerning the Protestant Religion'*

FOR PUBLIC USE

JUNE 2009



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## **I. Executive Summary**

Since 2006 the Vietnamese Government's Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA) has produced three substantive editions of an internal training manual outlining guidelines for dealing with religious affairs in the northern highland provinces. The first document (2006) was the subject of widespread criticism due to its attempt to subdue the rapid expansion of the Protestant religion in the region. In response to this criticism, the revised 2007 version softened the inflammatory language, but retained the core objection of "solving the Protestant problem" by subduing its development. Following a recent evaluation of the results of religious policy to date, the CRA produced a new manual in 2008 entitled "Training Manual for the Task Concerning the Protestant Religion", which seems to be intended to supersede the previous manuals (2006 and 2007) and to apply to the whole of Vietnam.

While the 2008 manual is less critical of Protestantism in its rhetoric and addresses some of the criticisms of the earlier editions, strong concerns remain. Of primary concern is the retention of an underlying suspicion of the Protestant religion and its perceived potential to be abused by 'hostile forces' to cause political instability. Also, although the manual expressly states that forced renunciations of faith are not permitted, it still encourages local officials to "create the conditions" for new converts to Protestantism to return to their traditional beliefs if they have a 'need' to do so, allowing for arbitrary implementation. Another major shortcoming concerns deficiency in the process of registration of congregations – local authorities are encouraged to begin with 'pilot projects' before undertaking widespread registrations, and additional stringent requirements are imposed on ethnic minorities in the northern highlands seeking to register Protestant meeting places. Finally, the 2008 manual adds an entirely new section to make clear the government's intent in ongoing regulation and tight control of all levels of religious activities of registered groups, individual congregations and meeting places.

## **2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the government of Vietnam should execute the following in order to improve religious freedom:

- I. Undertake a revision of the 2008 training manual to:
  - a. Remove inflammatory language that propagates suspicion of Protestantism and its potential to be abused by enemy forces;
  - b. Revise vague language that may be used by local authorities to put pressure upon any Protestants to renounce their faith;
  - c. Revise provisions dealing with ethnic minorities in the northern highland provinces to ensure that the religious legislation is applied uniformly throughout the country;
  - d. Amend provisions that give the government direct control over the worship and religious practices of registered churches in order to give the churches autonomy.
2. Expedite the registration of Protestant house churches by ensuring that local authorities are obliged to facilitate the process and that it is implemented uniformly across Vietnam, with no differentiation between provinces. In addition, delaying factors such as 'pilot projects' and special criteria for ethnic minorities should be removed;

3. Implement measures to prevent any attempts to force Protestants to renounce their faith.
4. Ensure that the training of local officials in the treatment of religious activities is fully consistent with international standards on religious freedom.
5. Establish and implement a comprehensive legislative framework that allows religious groups to engage in peaceful activities, both religious and humanitarian, in a manner which is free from secular government control and in accordance with international standards on religious freedom.
6. Fully investigate all allegations of religious freedom infringements by officials, including forcible renunciations of faith, physical assaults and incidents of discrimination in the dissemination of government benefits; and, where possible, seek the conviction of the perpetrators.

It is recommended that states and regional actors should call upon and engage with the government of Vietnam to adopt these recommendations.

### **3. Introduction**

In 2006, the CRA produced an internal training manual for dealing with religious affairs in the northern highland provinces. This document was widely criticised for its attempt to subdue the rapid expansion of the Protestant religion in the region. In response to this criticism, the government produced a revised version in 2007 that somewhat softened the inflammatory language but retained the core objective of “solving the Protestant problem” by subduing its development.

Another slightly revised version of the training manual, also dated 2007, came to light in late 2008. This version contained minor changes in language from the prior version, but more significantly, added a new section entitled “Results to Date of the Work Concerning the Protestant Religion in the Mountainous Region in the North”. In this section, the government noted that the task concerning the Protestant religion had some good success in that religious activity in the region “ha[d] been stabilised” and “brought into a situation where the government can manage it” (Lesson Three, Section IV). These results affirmed the government’s policy of bringing Protestant religious activity under the administration of the law.

However, the government noted a number of ongoing problems in the manual. Foremost among these was the fact that Party members and government officials of different ranks and localities still held widely varying views of the Protestant religion. These differences in perception directly influenced the degree to which the plan of registering and managing Protestant meeting places and sects had been implemented.

Following this evaluation, the CRA produced the 2008 training manual entitled “Training Manual for the Task Concerning the Protestant Religion” which seems to be intended to replace the previous 2006 and 2007 training manuals for the northwest mountainous region. Significantly, this new manual is aimed at training government officials in a common approach to Protestant issues for the whole country, including, but not limited to, the northern highlands covered by the prior manuals. As a comprehensive training manual, it is clearly an important gauge of Vietnam’s present official policy and approach to religion in general, and Protestantism in particular.

The 2008 manual has yet to be translated into English in its entirety. This analysis has therefore been undertaken in consultation with researchers fluent in Vietnamese. All page references correspond to the original Vietnamese language version.

## **4. Legislative and Policy Framework for Religious Activities**

### **4.1. Obligations under international law**

Vietnam is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>1</sup> Article 18, which closely mirrors the same article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), provides that, “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 in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching”.

Article 21 protects the right of “peaceful assembly”, while discrimination based on religion is proscribed and effective protection against discrimination guaranteed in Article 26. Article 27 protects the freedom of ethnic minorities to practise their own religion. Vietnam has also acceded to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Article 18(d)(vii) protects the “right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” for all, without distinction as to racial origin, which is also relevant to the religious freedom of ethnic minorities.

### **4.2. Domestic framework for religious activities**

#### **4.2.1. Constitution (1992)**

Article 70 of the Constitution of 1992 provides that “the citizen shall enjoy freedom of belief and of religion; he can follow any religion or follow none. All religions are equal before the law. The places of worship of all faiths and religions are protected by the law. No one can violate freedom of belief and of religion; nor can anyone misuse beliefs and religions to contravene the law and State policies”.

In addition, Article 69 protects the freedom of opinion and speech, the right to assemble and to “form associations and hold demonstrations in accordance with the provisions of the law”.

#### **4.2.2. Domestic legislation**

The legislative framework for the religious activities of individuals and organisations in Vietnam is defined in two documents introduced since late 2004, which supersede all previous provisions. The “Ordinance Regarding Religious Beliefs and Religious Organisations” (21/2004/PL-UBTVQH11) came into effect on 15 November 2004. On 1 March 2005, the “Decree on Religion” (22/2005/ND-CP), known informally as ‘Decree 22’, was promulgated as a set of guidelines for the implementation of the Ordinance, including the process for the registration and recognition of denominations and congregations.

In addition to these legislative documents, prior to the enactment of Decree 22, the Prime Minister enacted a special directive, “Directive no. 01/2005/CT-TTg of 04/02/2005 of the Prime Minister Concerning a Number of Tasks Regarding the Protestant Religion” (the ‘PMSDP 2005’) specifically to address Protestant issues. This was largely a stop-gap measure to show progress in accommodating Protestantism and has become the unseemly basis for the registration of house churches. Of greater concern, it has also become the basis for

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<sup>1</sup> Vietnam has acceded to this instrument.

forced recantations of faith by encouraging local officials to ‘create conditions’ to enable new Protestant believers to return to their traditional beliefs if they have a need to do so.

Article 1 of the Ordinance guarantees the right to freedom of religion and religious belief, and Article 8(1) prohibits discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs. Chapter 3 (articles 16–25) sets out provisions for religious organisations and their activities, including the system of registration for religious organisations and congregations.

However, the Ordinance also sets out a series of ill-defined caveats to the practice of religion, which go considerably further than the limitations stipulated in international protections for freedom of religion. Article 8(2) prohibits the “abuse” of religion to undermine national unity, to “sow division among the people, ethnic groups and religions” or to “spread superstitious practices”. Article 15 provides that religious activities will be suspended if they “negatively affect the unity of the people or the nation’s fine cultural traditions”. Article 16(1), which provides a definition for the recognition of religious organisations, stipulates that no organisation is permitted to be contrary to “the nation’s fine traditions”. Article 22 sets out stipulations for the character of religious leaders, which must be met for these persons to be recognised by the state, including that they must “possess the spirit of national unity and national harmony”. Article 35 requires that the international relationships of religious organisations be regulated by the CRA.

The religious policy provided in these documents is ‘religious freedom’ by management and administrative control in the form of three main levels of registration. ‘Level one registration’ is registration of a meeting place (usually a house church) to carry out religious activity and is granted by local authorities. ‘Level two registration’ is permission for a church organisation to carry out religious activity wherever it operates and may only be granted by the CRA. ‘Level three registration’ is full legal recognition, and this must be recommended by the CRA and signed by the Prime Minister. Full legal recognition is extremely difficult to obtain as it requires an organisation to demonstrate twenty years of stable operation.

The three main criticisms of the framework are the approach of regulating and managing religious activities, the level of conditionality that is set upon the practice of religion and the lack of clarity and consistency in the provisions for the registration of organisations and congregations.

The manuals used to train Party officials in the policy on religion, specifically Protestantism, have also been exposed as deficient. We know of no similar documents for other religions.

#### *4.2.3. Other policy documents*

Among the antecedents to the 2006, 2007 and 2008 manuals dealing with Protestantism are a series of ‘secret’ documents expressing official concern regarding the explosive growth of Protestant Christianity among the ethnic minorities in the northwest mountainous region.<sup>2</sup> These documents give clear instructions to “forbid and stop” the “contagious spread” of Protestantism to these areas. Although the 2004–2005 legislation is designed to supersede all previous provisions, a 1998 document called “The Problem of the Enemy Exploiting Religion” is reportedly still in use today.<sup>3</sup> This document espouses Marxist beliefs and suspicions of religion and contains ten tasks aimed at “preventing and opposing the enemy in

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<sup>2</sup> The Center of Religious Freedom, Freedom House collected and translated eight documents dated from 1998-2000 which give a clear insight into official thinking toward Protestantism in “Directions for Stopping Religion: Official Secret Vietnamese Documents on How to Arrest the Spread of Christianity and other Evidence of Religious Persecution”, published November 2000.

<sup>3</sup> “The Problem of the Enemy Exploiting Religion”, 24 December 1998, translated by Freedom House, Center for Religious Freedom, [http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/pdfdocs/vietnam\\_doc1.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/pdfdocs/vietnam_doc1.pdf).

exploiting religion in the new situation”. Progress in ameliorating Vietnam’s repressive policy on religion has been slowest in the northwest mountainous region where these documents circulated.

## 5. Summary of Content

The 2008 training manual, 53 pages in length, is divided into five sections or ‘lessons’. These lessons are similar in nature to those contained in the 2006 and 2007 training manuals. However, the portion of the manual addressing the policy and steps for dealing with Protestants (the subject of the third lesson in the 2006 and 2007 training manuals) has now been expanded into all three final lessons. The five lessons in the 2008 manual cover:

- (i) Policies of the Party and the Government Concerning Religion,
- (ii) Overview of Protestantism and Protestantism in Vietnam,
- (iii) The Current Situation of the Protestant Religion and Recommended Tasks Concerning the Protestant Religion,
- (iv) The Situation and Tasks Concerning Protestant Organisations and Denominations not yet Legally Recognised, and
- (v) The Tasks Concerning Churches and Meeting Places.

The first lesson, “Policies of the Party and the Government Concerning Religion”, provides general information about religion in Vietnam and the Party’s official views and policies concerning religion. It notes that the widespread nature of religious belief<sup>4</sup> has ‘forced’ the Party and the State to create appropriate guidelines toward religions in general and toward each religion in particular (p3). The need for these guidelines is fuelled by an underlying suspicion of religion and the belief that “enemy powers continually seek to exploit religion problems for their own selfish interest” and that this exploitation continues to create many problems that must be solved (p4).

The general perspective of the State on religion may be summarised as follows: the religious task is the “responsibility of all political organs under the leadership of the Party” (p3) in order to “mobilise all religious believers in national development priorities and in national solidarity” (p3); all religions are part of the great national unity bloc and there must be no discriminatory treatment based on religious belief (p3); all religious people must be part of Vietnam’s national aspirations of “citizens rich, country strong, and society just, democratic and enlightened” (p4); religion is a need of some citizens and officials should implement a policy of respect and ensure the right to believe or not to believe in a religion (p4); all religions must work within the framework of the law, may not abuse religion to preach heresies or superstitions or to force people to believe unwillingly (p.4); every believer has the right to worship in their homes and legal worship facilities approved by the authorities (although, implicitly not outside of these venues) (p4).

This perspective is very similar to that of the 2007 manual, but of note, specifically adds a policy of respect and tolerance for religious beliefs and a directive against discriminatory treatment on religious grounds. Whether these values are played out in real life remains to be seen, but the rhetoric seems to have improved.

The second lesson (eighteen pages) gives an overview of Protestantism, both in general and in Vietnam in particular. It contains some observations about Protestantism that might be perceived as threatening to Party members, including the ideas that: Protestantism elevates

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<sup>4</sup> The manual notes that, according to the State Committee for Religion Affairs’ statistics in 2005, there are nearly twenty million believers of six official religions.

the values of private property, capitalism, individual rights and democracy (p19); faith and dignity of the individual are high values in Protestantism (p19); and evangelism is the overriding activity of the Protestant religion, aimed at both city dwellers and ethnic minorities, and is accomplished by all means, especially charitable and social work (p19). However, it also contains the positive observation that many Protestant organisations have contributed to peace, stability and social development (p19).

The main interest in the document is contained in the final three lessons: the third lesson (four pages), which sets forth the policy and steps for dealing with the Protestant religion; the fourth lesson (thirteen pages), which deals with the Protestant organisations and denominations which are not yet legally recognised; and the fifth lesson (six pages), which sets forth the management tasks concerning Protestant churches and individual meeting places. This analysis is chiefly concerned with these three lessons.

The 2008 manual has three official forms appended, similar to those in the 2007 manual. The first is a registration form to request permission for Protestant activities by a congregation or meeting place (for use by these congregations); the second, an agreement to lend a private house to be used for Protestant religious activities; and the third, a certification form for Protestant religious activities for a local congregation (for use by government authorities).

## **6. Analysis**

The main concerns surrounding the 2007 edition of the training manual were:

- Its continued political suspicion of religion;
- Its continued administration of restrictive control over religion;
- Its concealment, rather than removal, of provisions for forcible renunciations of faith; and
- Deficiencies of the registration process.

The following analysis of the 2008 manual is offered in light of these concerns and the extent to which they have been addressed.

### ***6.1. Comparison of core provisions for treatment of Protestants***

A major concern of the 2006 and 2007 manuals was their stated objective of subduing the growth of the Protestant religion. The 2006 training manual listed as one of its objectives, “to stop and defeat the scheme exploiting the Protestant religion by all the internal and foreign enemy forces to defeat the revolutionary mandate and heritage of our Party and State”. While this rhetoric was softened in the 2007 version, the core objective remained “to solve the Protestant problem” and specifically “to resolutely subdue the abnormally rapid and spontaneous development of the Protestant religion in the region”.

While still suspicious of religion, the 2008 manual no longer explicitly states subduing its growth as a goal. Rather, it states its objectives in terms of maintaining national unity. It acknowledges that “religion is a need and will remain a need of some citizens as we build a socialist country” (p2). These religious beliefs must be respected, but religion must be managed so that believers can be “mobilise[d]” in “national development priorities and in national solidarity” (p3). Religion is stated as acceptable so long as it operates within the law and does not pose a threat to national unity.



Another troubling aspect of the 2006 and 2007 training manuals was their explicit or implicit categorisation of congregations based on how 'stably' they have practised their religion. The 2006 manual explicitly stated that members of less stable congregations should be "mobilised to return to their traditional beliefs". The 2007 manual removed the formal categorisations but left the less stable congregations to the arbitration of local officials. The 2008 manual does not explicitly contain the stability categorisations and expressly states that forced renunciations of faith are not permitted. However, it retains a vestige of the criticised 'stability' approach in Lesson Three, IV, 2 where it states that if citizens in the northern mountain provinces who have "newly followed Protestantism ... have a need to return to their traditional religion" officials should "create the conditions to fulfil that desire" (p26). While the ban on forced renunciations is a positive step, this stipulation still leaves the door open for government officials to decide arbitrarily who has a need to return to their traditional religion and then allows them considerable leeway in creating the ill-defined conditions for their return.

The 2008 manual contains a further improvement in that it does not explicitly bifurcate Protestant leaders according to their attitudes toward government authority and the law, as did the 2006 and 2007 manuals. However, the newly-added Lesson 5 makes it clear that leaders have an obligation to teach their members to love their country and to observe citizen rights and duties (p49).

## **6.2. Areas of concern**

### *6.2.1. Continued political suspicion of religion*

The 2008 manual further moderates and softens the harsh language about religion and Protestants used in the previous training manuals. It also enumerates several of the positive aspects of Protestantism, specifically its effect on peace and stability and social development (p19). Ultimately, it notes that while the entry and development of Protestant organisations has brought with it both negative and positive factors in economic life, culture, society and public security, "with the passage of time, the negative factors have lessened, and the positive factors are in keeping with our direction, especially in regard to morality and a good way of living" (p37).

However, the underlying suspicion of religion remains strong. As in the 2007 manual, it describes "enemy powers" who "seek to exploit religion problems for their own selfish interests" (p2). According to the manual, this exploitation is related to "ethnic issues and human rights" as well as "a few shortcomings in the implementation of our religion policy" (p2). The manual also voices a concern that these forces will "lure separatist elements in the religious organisations to cause unrest within their own organisations" (p2).

While the government recognises the citizens' need for religion and even the many positive effects of Protestantism, official thinking still connects religion with schemes of "enemy forces which hope to destroy the precious revolution of our people" (p2). Further evidence that the government remains concerned with the growth of Protestantism can be found in Lesson Four, which discusses the reasons for the "infiltration and appearance" of Protestant groups and cites the slowness of the government in addressing the 'Protestant problem' as a major contributing factor. In spite of the moderated language contained in the 2008 manual, the retention of this suspicious belief, as well as the mandate to "vigilantly fight" (p2) to defeat the schemes of enemy forces will no doubt work against the government's stated objective of convincing the Party and government officials to fundamentally change their views of Protestantism.

### *6.2.2. Continuing deficiencies in the registration process*

The manual acknowledges that the results achieved in terms of registration have been very modest and limited in light of the many Protestant groups who have not yet registered. According to the government's figures, a large majority of the 70 Protestant organisations, belonging to nine main groupings, do not have legal recognition (p24). To date, only eight organisations have been granted full recognition and the accompanying freedom to operate freely according to the law.<sup>5</sup> Further, less than half of all local congregations have been granted level one registration to hold meetings.<sup>6</sup>

The failure to attain registration has serious consequences for religious freedom under Vietnam's legislative framework. Believers' right to worship is limited to their private homes or "legal worship facilities approved by the authorities" (p4). Further, only "legal religions, recognised by the Government" are allowed to organise training facilities, publish religious books, build and maintain worship facilities or conduct missionary work (p4). By definition, many believers are forced to worship illegally.

The manual encourages local officials to incorporate under the administration of the law the activities of those Protestant groups that are not yet recognised, in order to solve citizens' needs for religion and to contribute to the stabilisation of the religious situation. However, inconsistencies and limitations in the religious legislation make it difficult for full legal recognition to be achieved. Only organisations that have operated continuously since 1975 are candidates for full legal recognition (after a one year period); other organisations must demonstrate twenty years of stable operation. Since government permission is required to organise assemblies and open training schools, fundamental difficulties exist for organisations to achieve this operation requirement without having achieved legal recognition.

The manual also retains the concept of experimenting with 'pilot projects' in each locality that need to be evaluated before the work can be expanded. This practice gives considerable discretion to local officials to deny registration arbitrarily. Further, Protestants in the western highlands and northwest mountainous region face additional requirements, which are discussed in more detail below. Church leaders have reported significant manipulation in the registration process in which leaders that compromise their integrity and religious independence tend to gain an advantage, and those who are critical of government involvement see the applications ignored. In practice, it has been reported that the registration of meeting places is still most honoured in the breach, as applications by hundreds of meeting places have gone unanswered or been denied.

The chronic deficiency in the registration process highlights a major shortcoming in Vietnam's current policy framework for religious activities.

### *6.2.3. Restrictive measures for ethnic minority Protestants*

The 2008 manual contains special provisions dealing with Protestants in the western highlands and the northwest mountainous region. It also refers to two special documents: Plan no. 04/KH-TGCP-TL dated 26/04/2005 for the western highlands and Plan no. 05/KH-TGCP-TL dated 08/02/2006 for the northern mountainous provinces, the contents of which are not public.

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<sup>5</sup> These include the Evangelical Church of Vietnam North, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam South, Seven Day Adventists, Vietnam Mission Church, Grace Baptist Church (Southern Baptist) Presbyterian Church of Vietnam and Vietnam Baptist Church (Southern Baptist).

<sup>6</sup> The manual states that approximately 400 local congregations had been registered by 2005 but does not cite more recent statistics. Church leaders report that the number of individual congregations registered is now over 400, but still fewer than half of the total number of congregations is registered.

In contrast to the rest of the country, congregations in the western highlands and northwest mountainous region that are accepted by, and belong to, the fully-recognised Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) (ECVN(N)) or the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) (ECVN(S)) must begin with level one registration before they may begin the process to become fully registered members of their legally-recognised denomination. In the northwest mountainous region, only authorities can initiate level one registration, and this happens very slowly. Only 124 of more than 1000 ethnic minority congregations had been given level one registration by February 2009. The remainder essentially worship illegally due to current regulations restricting unregistered worship to private homes.

More disturbing is the directive to local authorities to “create the conditions” for citizens in these regions who have newly followed Protestantism to be able return to their traditional religion if they have a “need” to do so (p27).<sup>7</sup> While the manual expressly states that forced renunciations of faith are not permitted, this directive allows local officials an unacceptable level of discretion in determining who has a ‘need’ to return to their traditional beliefs and in creating the ill-defined ‘conditions’ for their return. Church leaders have reported that these ‘conditions’ have been created through social discrimination methods such as not granting identification papers, withholding relief help and denying children’s education.

Local authorities are given special directions with respect to ‘Dega’ and Hmong Protestants in the western highlands. With respect to those who have ‘separated themselves’ from the ‘Dega’ Protestants (deemed responsible for 2001 and 2004 uprisings against religious freedom abuses and land confiscation), local authorities are directed to look at three factors to decide whether to register a church or meeting place in conjunction with a legally-recognised Protestant denomination: the need to carry on religious activities, the peoples’ ideas and psychology, and the potential for exploitation by the enemy. Hmong Protestants who migrated to the western highlands and are “law-abiding and have a genuine need to practise religion” should be examined by local government authorities to see if they can be registered in connection with ECVN(S) or another Protestant denomination: they do not have a choice in the denomination they join. ECVN(N) leaders have reported that in practice, many hundreds of applications for registration filed by Hmong congregations with the help of the ECVN(N) have been ignored for a long time.

#### *6.2.4. Intrusive State regulation*

An entirely new lesson (Lesson 5) has been added to the 2008 manual to make clear the government’s intention to continue ongoing regulation of all levels of registered groups, individual congregations and meeting places.

After granting registration, local authorities are directed to implement regulation in all matters: the content of religious activities, the place of worship, the citizenship responsibilities of the leaders and believers and the fundraising of their congregations (p46). Each local church is required annually to submit a complete outline of all their religious activities for the upcoming year. They may carry out these activities only if they do not receive any objections or suggestions within 30 days. Presumably, they will need to alter their plans if the local authorities voice any objections. Leaders of registered churches have reported that they are experiencing an unacceptable level of government control over worship and religious practice. As a consequence, some unregistered groups have been unwilling to pursue registration.

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<sup>7</sup> This directive first appeared in the PMSDP 2005 and has been consistently used since then to force believers to renounce their Protestant faith and return to their traditional beliefs.

The government also exercises control over religious practice through its requirements that Protestant churches be patriotic in several respects. Several descriptions of congregations contained throughout Lesson Four of the manual refer to the denomination's motto which is required to show a strong and patriotic commitment and must include a statement that they will serve the State directly (pp29–32). Further, Protestant leaders are required to guide their followers to be patriotic, to fulfil their civic duties and to carry on religious activities according to the law (p49). It is not acceptable to be apolitical; religious leaders are expected to affirm actively both the Party and the State.