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VIETNAM Hanoi church leaders injured in gang attack

Leaders from an unregistered house church in Hanoi, Vietnam, were attacked and beaten by a gang of men during a meeting on November 13. Twelve were seriously injured and the gang threatened to kill the pastor if he continues to organize church meetings.

The meeting was underway at the house of Pastor Nguyen Danh Chau when a group of men stormed the meeting at 9:30 am. Five men, four women and three teenage children were injured as a result and Pastor Nguyen Danh Chau lay unconscious for several hours. He is left with severe chest, stomach and head pain. A woman, Nguyen Thi Lan was unable to walk after receiving blows to the stomach and groin. The gang then smashed property belonging to the church members including chairs, a pulpit and a cross, as well as stealing parts from motorbikes and destroying Pastor Danh Chau's family fruit trees and kitchen garden.

In the middle of the attack, members of the gang reportedly ran outside and shouted, "The Christian pastors are savagely beating people up!" in an attempt to defame members of the church.

The Agape Baptist Church in Lai Tao hamlet, Bot Xuyen village, My Duc district, Ha Tay province, is part of an unregistered house church denomination that was founded in 2007. It has around 2,200 members, who meet in over 35 congregations in and around Hanoi.

While improvements in religious freedom have been seen in recent years, gang attacks are not uncommon in Vietnam and it is thought that local police and security officials sometimes employ gangs to undertake such attacks; the perpetrators are rarely prosecuted. In September a house church in Quang Nam province that belonged to a recognized denomination, the Vietnam Baptist Church, was attacked twice by 20 thugs who threatened to destroy the church and kill all of the members. Calls made to the police during the attack were not responded to.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW condemns the attack on Agape Baptist Church, whose peaceful meeting is protected by Vietnamese legislation. CSW calls upon the Vietnamese government to investigate fully the events of the attack on the church, to allow access to appropriate medical care for the victims, and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Vietnam's commitment to religious freedom must be matched with concrete protection for those whose religious freedom is violated."

Notes to Editors:

1. Vietnam requires legal registration of denominational groups; registration can only be granted following twenty years 'stable operation'.