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## VIETNAM | Bishop Appeals to International Community Following Attacks

Msgr. Paul Nguyen Thai Hop, Catholic Bishop of Vinh diocese on Vietnam's north-central coast, [has appealed](#) for "international support and solidarity" following violent attacks against Catholics in Nghe An Province on Sept. 4 which left at least 40 people seriously injured.

Msgr. Paul Nguyen Thai Hop has described the situation for Christians there as "dangerous and worrying." According to sources inside the country, on Sept. 4 police and militia used tear gas, electric batons and police dogs to break up a peaceful protest against the arrest and detention of two Catholics from My Yen parish.

The two men, Nguyen Van Hai, 43, and Ngo Van Khoi, 53, were arrested on May 22 as men believed to be plainclothes police officers stopped and searched Catholics visiting a shrine in Nghi Phuong Commune. The men's families were informed that they had been charged with "disturbing public order." Their communities hoped they would be released as part of Vietnam's national day amnesty on Sept. 2.

When they were not released, Catholics gathered to protest in front of the Nghi Phuong District Peoples' Committee office on Sept. 3. Some sources suggest that the local district chief then issued a paper promising the release of the two men on Sept. 4. When family and friends arrived to collect the two men, they were told no such promise had been made. More protesters joined the demonstration, at which point hundreds of police, military, and hired "thugs" beat and chased protesters, smashed religious statues and fired live ammunition into the air. They also arrested 15 people, who were released on Sept. 5.

Following the attacks, the state-controlled media and the authorities produced reports claiming that the police's use of force had been justified and the protesters had themselves been armed with sticks and stones. The bishop himself has also been the subject of attacks by the state media effectively accusing him of inciting subversion. On Sept. 16, Vietnamese Catholics responded by holding a "mass for peace and justice" nearby the site of the protest.

In an interview with AsiaNews published on Sept. 18, Msgr. Paul Nguyen Thai Hop appealed to the international community and called for the observance of human rights, the release of the two men still detained, and reparations for the victims of the attacks on Sept. 4.

Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “The attacks on Vietnamese Catholics in Vinh diocese, both physical and verbal, are a clear violation of the rights to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam is a party. We call on the Vietnamese government to release the two men still detained, to halt all attacks on religious minorities in Vietnam and lift restriction on their religious freedom.”