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VIETNAM | Religious Leaders Issue Statement Criticizing Regulations

Representatives from various religious groups in Vietnam issued [a statement](#) on Oct. 4 accusing the Vietnamese government of attempting to destroy religions in the country.

Religious leaders from the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao Buddhist and Cao Dai are all signatories to the statement, entitled “Concerning the Ordinance on Religion and Belief of 2004 and the 2012 Decree on Directives and Measures for Implementing the Ordinance on Religion and Belief.” In the statement, which is addressed to Vietnamese government officials, clergy, religious groups and citizens, as well as to members of the international community including the United Nations, the authors address both the conceptual and practical obstacles to the realization of religious freedom in Vietnam.

According to the authors, the Communist Party and the government of Vietnam view religion as harmful to society and have attempted to destroy religions, “using both force and administrative measures.” They accuse the Vietnamese regime of having “threatened, harassed, assaulted, detained, or placed under restricted movement status many adherents, clergy members, and members of religious orders who tried to conduct legitimate religious activities.”

The statement asserts that lack of legal status prevents religious organizations from engaging in routine transactions such as opening a bank account or buying and owning property. Although religious organizations are able to register for the purposes of operation, they face many restrictions, as outlined in the statement. In January 2013, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) produced a summary of the main concerns held by religious leaders, activists and legal experts regarding Decree 92, many of which are raised in this statement.

The statement concludes that Ordinance No. 21 and Decree No. 92 have been used not to protect religious freedom but to control all religious life, to use religions and their organizations for propaganda purposes, to stifle criticism of the government by religious organizations, and to prevent these organizations from contributing to civil society. It states that large-scale celebrations and places of worship are not necessarily indicators of genuine religious freedom,

which can only exist “when a government truly acknowledges the fundamental rights of religious organizations.” Finally, the authors call for the release of all prisoners of conscience, operational independence and freedom from government interference for religious organizations, and the return of tangible property and other assets.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We welcome the efforts of different religious groups to come together to address issues of mutual concern regarding freedom of religion or belief in Vietnam. CSW shares many of these concerns, and urges the government of Vietnam to thoroughly and impartially investigate the issues raised by these religious organizations. We further call on the government to revise regulations and directives which place on religious organizations and activities unnecessary restrictions incompatible with international standards on the right to freedom of religion or belief.”