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VIETNAM | Religious Freedom Report Issued

Twenty-four independent Vietnamese civil society organizations (CSOs), co-signed a report drawing attention to human rights abuses in Vietnam in 2014, including violations against the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The report aims to alert the UN Human Rights Council, the European External Action Service, foreign embassies in Vietnam and various members of the international community to “the blatant, illegal and systematic crackdowns on human rights defenders and dissidents” in Vietnam. In particular, the report claims that there are at least 105 prisoners of conscience currently detained in the country.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes the report, which includes information on the attacks on the Mennonite church center in Binh Duong Province which CSW reported from June to November 2014. The CSOs’ report also covers the prohibition of worship and (religious) gatherings, the beating of religious clerks, monks and believers, and the demolition of religious facilities. CSW shares the authors’ concern about the use of the charge of “carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s administration” (Article 79 of the penal code) to suppress peaceful religious activists.

The report’s signatories include Protestant, Hoa Hao Buddhist, Cao Dao, and Buddhist faith-based organizations, as well as several other organizations which promote the rights of religious minorities. This reflects CSW’s observation that religious leaders and lay people in Vietnam are “at the forefront of the struggle to promote human rights and rule of law [...] becoming, even as the government clamps down on freedom of expression, the voice of dissent.”

CSW’s Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, “We welcome this report by independent Vietnamese civil society organizations. As the report observes, Vietnam was elected to the UN Human Rights Council in November 2013, yet over one year on, the government has yet to address the grave human rights concerns raised in the report, including violations against Christians and other religion or belief communities. We encourage religious and other civil society organizations to continue to advocate for religious freedom, and we urge the Vietnamese government to immediately release prisoners of conscience, and to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief of all religious minorities.”