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VIETNAM | Government Urged to Revise Draft Law on Belief, Religion

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), in association with 27 civil society and religious organizations, called upon the Vietnamese government to revise the draft Law on Belief and Religion to conform with Vietnam's obligations under international human rights law.

Vietnam's draft Law on Belief and Religion acknowledges "the right to freedom of religion and belief" and says that the government "respects and protects the freedom of religion and belief of everyone."

However, in its current state, the draft law places severe limitations on the right to freedom of religion or belief which are not compatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Vietnam is a party. Religious leaders and legal experts fear that, if passed, the draft law would act as a powerful instrument which would allow the repression of religious activities and communities to continue.

In a joint statement, CSW and other civil society organizations highlighted concerns about the draft such as onerous requirements for the registration of religious organizations, excessive state control over and interference in religious organizations' internal affairs, and overly broad and ambiguous language that may lead to discrimination.

Provisions in the draft law would empower the government to intrusively monitor and "intervene in the internal affairs and administration" of religious organizations, subjecting them to government interference and control over matters concerning religious appointments, pedagogy and training. The language of the draft law remains broad and ambiguous and could be used by the government to discriminate against certain groups in society such as ethnic and indigenous minorities, independent groups and those whose religion and belief is seen as "foreign," in favor of religious entities that are recognized by the government.

CSW's Chief Operating Officer Andy Dipper said, "We join with civil society and religious organizations in Vietnam and around the world in calling on the Vietnamese government to revise the draft law in line with international standards on the right to freedom of religion or belief, in accordance with Article 18 of the ICCPR. We further call on those responsible for

drafting the law to make these revisions in consultation with religious leaders and legal experts, and to draw on the guidance and expertise of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.”