

# Documents

## Religious Discrimination in Vietnam

*A collection of documents has recently reached Keston College. They were translated and published by the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation (69 boulevard Desgranges, 92330 Sceaux, France) and concern religious discrimination in Vietnam since the communist take-over. Most of the documents give details on the persecution of the Unified Buddhist Church (UBC) of Vietnam. Some of these documents were examined by Bernard Levin in The Times, 24, 25 and 27 January 1978.*

*The first document in the collection is an appeal to the outside world from the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, dated 9 June 1977.*

*Cuts in the text of all the documents printed below are indicated by [ . . . ]. Ed.*

AN APPEAL MADE BY THE UNIFIED BUDDHIST  
CHURCH OF VIETNAM FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SOCIALIST  
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

It was with much joy and hope that on 30 April 1975, Vietnamese Buddhists welcomed peace after more than 30 years of war.

During the weeks preceding the liberation of Saigon, the Unified Buddhist Church struggled very hard to prevent unnecessary killing and destruction by both sides of the war and especially to prevent the destruction of Saigon, with its population of almost four million. To achieve this goal the Unified Buddhist Church:

Exercised its maximum influence on both sides of the war, especially on

the government of General Duong Van Minh to do its utmost to save the crowded population of Saigon and other cities from destruction.

Called on the Buddhist people to welcome without fear the end of the war. In an urgent appeal to the population made by the Church on 9 April 1975, the Unified Buddhist Church said: "If the enlightenment of oneself is also that of others, then the service to our compatriots in the spirit of co-operation and reconciliation is the service of Buddhism itself. We Buddhists should not be prisoners of ideology, because human lives are more precious than ideology. We should be determined to work for the following aims: (1) to be aware that it would be much easier to serve the country and Buddhism once we have peace; (2) to ask both sides of the war to refrain from causing unnecessary suffering because of ideological differences; and (3) to ask both sides to reduce violence to its strict minimum in order to save human life."

Having faith in the promises of national reconciliation made by the Provisional Revolutionary Government, Buddhists in Vietnam have done their utmost to co-operate with the revolutionary government since the day of liberation. The Unified Buddhist Church was not invited to the meeting on 15 May 1975, organized by the government to celebrate the great victory of the Vietnamese people; but the Buddhist Church, in order to show her will to co-

operate in the effort for reunification and reconstruction, was able to mobilize up to 900 monks and nuns of Ho Chi Minh City to come to participate. [ . . . ] On 19 May 1975, 20,000 Buddhists in Ho Chi Minh City gathered in front of the An Quang Pagoda for a tribute to President Ho Chi Minh to celebrate his birthday. That was known as the most important gathering on that day in Ho Chi Minh City, and the only one not organized by the government. [ . . . ]

#### *Confiscation of Buddhist Institutions*

Thousands of schools, dispensaries, orphanages and day-care centres, administered by Buddhist workers, have been "taken over to be administered" by the government, and thousands of Buddhist workers have undergone hardship, forced to seek other jobs. The Vanh Hnah Buddhist University was closed down. The School of Youth for Social Service was closed down. The Buddhist Committee for Reconstruction and Development was disbanded, and its account was blocked. All newspapers and magazines and publication houses of the Church were closed down. Monks and nuns are not allowed to continue teaching in the schools, working in hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages and child-care centres. Since we were resigned to these things, they happened without our resistance. Our view was that it would be only a blessing if government cadres could administer the schools, dispensaries, orphanages, and day-care centres that have been taken from our Church. However, hundreds of these institutions have been closed because the government did not have enough trained personnel, and because our workers were not permitted to continue their service; they were not trusted.

After the transfer, many of our schools no longer function as schools, but have become dormitories and offices for government cadres (for example, the Bo De High School in Qui Nhon, Binh Dinh Province). There are cases where cadres sent from the North are not capable of administering these institutions, and the result is that they are now closed down. The government trusts only Party members, even if this results in the placing of incompetent people in important positions. Having given up the work of cul-

tural and social institutions, including schools, orphanages, publishing houses, magazines and so forth, thousands of workers turned to collective farming of the land. The government taxed them so severely that they were forced to give up these collectives. A group of monks in Long Thanh grew black peppers in 1975 and sold the crop for 2,000,000 piasters. The taxes were 1,900,000 piasters. They next grew sugar cane in 1976. They sold the crop for 300,000 piasters. The taxes were 300,000 piasters. The group broke up and individuals went to look for other jobs. No jobs were available because there are millions already jobless. Thousands of capable intellectuals find no chance to exercise their talents. They become jobless or pedicab drivers or unskilled farm workers.

[ . . . ] Pursuing the policy of shattering the religious communities in our country, the government has arrested hundreds of monks, confiscated hundreds of pagodas and converted them into government administration buildings, removed and smashed Buddha and Bodhisattra statues, prohibited the celebration of the Buddha's birthday as a national holiday, made it impossible for monks and nuns to support themselves financially, prevented laymen from coming to temples, and forbidden monks to travel and preach by ordering restrictions in the name of "national security".

Because of threats of arrest and travel restrictions, not all the incidents of oppression of the Buddhist community have yet been discovered and reported. The Unified Buddhist Church reported to the central government each time such incidents became known. But the government has kept silent, and the situation of oppression has got worse and worse. On 9 February 1977, the Unified Buddhist Church wrote to the government asking for the release of 19 monks who had been arrested and detained without trial. The government did not reply. On 17 March 1977, the Unified Buddhist Church summarized all the incidents which it had investigated, and presented the government with a memorandum in which 85 cases of oppression were noted, with a request for the government to investigate. Again the government did not reply.

The self-immolation of 12 monks and nuns of the Duoc Su Monastery in the

province of Can Tho on 2 November 1975, was one of the earliest manifestations of resistance against the policy of discrimination against belief. By the end of 1975, the Unified Buddhist Church had received a number of reports of oppression, but our Church continued to try to convince local Buddhist communities to persevere in the hope of making the government understand. In earlier reports submitted to the government, we have always avoided blaming the central government and requested only that the government encourage local authorities to strictly follow the government's policy of religious freedom. But not only did the government not try to resolve the problems, it also tried to cover up the acts of oppression. After repeated requests, three monks of the Unified Buddhist Church were allowed to go to Can Tho with government officials. In a joint meeting between central and local government officials and the monks, the head of the Tan Binh Village, in which the Duoc Su Temple was located, revealed the truth about the immolations, and his testimony was later confirmed by the chief of the province. The tape recordings of this testimony, made by the investigating monks, were confiscated. The head of the district and the head of the province were later removed from their functions; they had not consented to use the government's version of events: "Abbot Hue Hien killed 11 monks and nuns and then burned himself and the monastery".\*

Vietnamese Buddhists have repeatedly shown their intention of adapting themselves to the new situation, and their readiness to co-operate in building socialism.<sup>4</sup> We are used to being poor, and we have learned to oppose our oppressors. We are capable of austerity and perseverance. Our financial resources come from the fruits of our labour (handicrafts, soya sauce, etc. — our monks have been farming to support themselves since the tenth century). [...] We want only to be Buddhist and social-

\*[A tape made by the 12 monks and nuns during a service with people of the village, just before the self-immolations, has recently been recovered and is now in the possession of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation, France. *Trans.*]

ist at the same time. We have learned to speak the language of Marxism and have tried to make ourselves understood in this language. The Communist Party does not seem to understand or tolerate our deepest wishes. And we have lost much of our hope. We have suffered maltreatment, discrimination and oppression.

Speaking of the Buddhist viewpoint at the Assembly for Reunification, the Venerable Thich Man Giac, Head of the Department of Culture of the Unified Buddhist Church, said: "Socialism is an excellent base for reunification, because socialism can both build and protect reunification . . . because socialism aims at abolishing the exploitation of man by man and at social justice." [...] In a letter requesting permission to publish a Buddhist bi-monthly magazine (on 8 August 1975), all Buddhist papers having been suppressed, the Unified Buddhist Church promised to "expound the Buddhist doctrine in a manner favourable to the revolutionary way of rebuilding the country, and to use only official information published by the Communist Party and the government. We shall strictly follow the policy prescribed by the government." To date, the government has not seemed to perceive our good will and has never responded to our requests for meetings or agreements.

[In a later meeting with the government representative at An Quang Pagoda, Thich Tri Quang remarked that "now that the revolutionaries are installed in air-conditioned offices, it is a thousand times more difficult to see them than when they were still in the jungle".]

[...] Government cadres proclaim everywhere that Buddhism is the opium of the people, that religious literature is poisonous and reactionary, that monks are inactive; and those who try to demonstrate the opposite risk punishment. Efforts by the Unified Buddhist Church to make public documents which reveal the non-cooperative attitude of the government, resulted in the arrest of the most important leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church. The Vice-Chairman, Thich Huyen Quang, the General Secretary, Thich Quang Do, the General Commissioner for Dissemination of Buddhist Teachings, Thich Thuyen An, and the Commissioner of Buddhist Lay Organizations, Thich Thong Buu, were arrested.

The government also undermined the Unified Buddhist Church's efforts at self-sufficiency by arresting the Venerable Thich Thong Hue and Thich Thanh The, who were in charge of self-supporting projects of our Church. (A government statement documenting the arrests is available.)

We speak out not only for the sake of our religious community but also for the whole Vietnamese people. Other religious communities in Vietnam suffer as much as we do. At least 400 Catholic priests are in detention, and several Catholic priests who were opponents of the former Thieu regime have died from the repression. Several leaders of Cao Dai and Hoa Hao have been arrested. Hundreds of thousands of people have been detained in a new form of prison called "re-education camps" and their whereabouts are commonly not known to relatives. Several thousand have died from disease, malnutrition, maltreatment, and despair. Corruption within government cadres is widespread and becoming worse and worse. The country has become a police state. Adults and children are forced to report on each other in case of any dissident ideas or actions. Suspicion arises between friends, brothers, co-workers and relatives. The atmosphere is like hell. We struggled against the regimes of Ngo Dinh Diem, Nguyen Khanh, and Nguyen Van Thieu, partly because these regimes deprived us of civil liberties. [...] Totalitarianism destroys all possibility of genuine national reconciliation and concord. National reconciliation and concord are a mockery, despite the struggle of the National Liberation Front and the non-violent forces which brought peace to the country.

Archbishop Nguyen Kim Dien of Hue, in a brave and candid speech made during a meeting on 15 April 1977, organized in Hue by the Fatherland Front of Binh Tri Thien, spoke of the suffering of the Catholic community in Vietnam and suggested that, if genuine freedom of religion were granted, there would not be manifestations of dissidence by religious people and no occasion to arrest religious leaders. Since the liberation, thousands have committed suicide out of despair. Thousands have fled the country in small boats. Hospitals are reserved for cadres; civilians hardly have a

chance to be hospitalized when sick, while more than 200 doctors remain in detention. School-children under 14 have been assigned to collect pieces of scrap-metal in big garbage heaps and other places during the summer vacation; this has resulted in numerous explosions of old munitions and the loss of hundreds of lives. The recent accident on 12 June 1977, which killed 25 children, is an example. Tens of thousands of war veterans are left without any care. Civilian efforts to help orphans, especially those not in orphanages, have been stopped. Hundreds of thousands of them have been abandoned to the care of relatives who are barely capable of feeding themselves. Farmers who used to cultivate rice for sale have reduced the amount of land under cultivation, and are producing enough rice only for their own families, because taxes are high (40 per cent) and what is left is bought by the government with only credit certificates. Many technicians are still in re-education camps after two years. People without any experience in farming, like teachers and shopkeepers, have been forced to take up the plough. Local irrigation systems have been planned by non-specialists without co-ordination between areas. The result has been catastrophic: water with a high acid content has destroyed a lot of crops. A country that used to export rice has no rice to eat, even though the number of "labourers" has now increased about ten times.

#### *For a Tolerant Society*

What do we want? We do not strive for political power. Our aim is not to overthrow the government. We do not aim at smearing the government. We only want to live with dignity and to participate in the work of rebuilding the country. In the history of Vietnam there have been periods when people of different ideologies were able to live happily together in peace for centuries. We ask for tolerance and the right to participate in the task of building life, not as machines but as human beings with minds and hearts.

We call upon our fellow Buddhists and our compatriots of different ideological affiliations – Catholics, Protestants, CaoDaists, HoaHaoists and Marxists – to understand and to unite to work

for legitimate national reconciliation and concord so as to build a united, peaceful and democratic Socialist Republic. We are appealing that the government:

release all religious and political prisoners and the hundreds of thousands who are suffering and dying in re-education camps;

implement seriously the policy of freedom of worship: allowing people to go to temples and churches, even in the provinces and countryside, allowing synods to be held, allowing the publication and circulation of biblical, sutra and other religious texts, ending the conversion of temples and churches into dormitories and offices, ending the removal and destruction of religious statues;

move to end corruption among governmental agents and cadres;

allow competent people, who are not Party members, to participate in the work of administration and reconstruction according to their capacity;

allow Buddhist, Christian clergymen and lay people to resume social work as government employees without having to renounce their religious belief;

abolish social injustices as shown in the discrimination between government cadres and Party members on the one hand and the rest of the population on the other. Everyone should be allowed equal access to the schools and hospitals, and have the chance to purchase medicines, food and other items which up to now can be bought only by the privileged.

Ho Chi Minh City, 9 June 1977

THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE  
COUNCIL OF THE UNIFIED  
BUDDHIST CHURCH OF  
VIETNAM.

*The following document dated 17 March 1977, gives examples of the kind of treatment which has been inflicted on Vietnamese Buddhists by the authorities. We print a selection from 85 specific actions listed.*

FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE UNIFIED BUDDHIST CHURCH OF VIETNAM RESPECTFULLY TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AND ALSO TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR INSPECTION, HANOI.

*Violations of the policy of freedom of worship in Southern Vietnam.*

Dear Mr Prime Minister,

Since the day of total liberation of the Southern part of Vietnam, several violations of the policy for freedom of worship (enacted by the government) have occurred in different parts of the country.

The Unified Buddhist Church has reported all these events to the former Military Management Committee of Saigon - Gia Dinh, to the former Provisional Revolutionary Government and to the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, asking for intervention to curb such violations. The situation has not been improved, but rather has become worse.

For the above reasons, we respectfully send to you, Mr Prime Minister, and also to the Central Committee for Inspection, a set of documents recording a number of events that have occurred during the last two years, for you and for the Committee to study, and respectfully ask you to take appropriate measures to ensure that local governments will not let such events occur in future. Our purpose is to re-create the faith of Buddhist followers in the policy of the government and to consolidate the union of our people.

Please accept our thanks and salutations.

For the Most Venerable Chairman  
of the Central Executive Council,  
the Deputy Chairman

VENERABLE THICH HUYEN QUANG

[A selection from a long list of violations follows. Ed.]

PHU BON PROVINCE

On 14 March 1976, at 6.15 a.m., the headquarters of the Buddhist Youth Organization of Cheo Reo district was destroyed by local officers of the government.

On the same day, the local government seized the campus and houses for monks of the Buddhist Temple of Cheo Reo, and transformed it into a governmental cadres centre.

#### DHA NANG CITY

On 15 February 1975, the government officers entered the Dieu Dinh orphanage, without advance notice, and rudely carried away all orphans, furniture, blankets, and other supplies.

#### QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

During the night of 27 October 1975, the Main Shrine and the Buddha's statue of the Phap Hoa Temple, beside the Cho Moi Market (Lam Loc Hamlet, Tinh Ha Village, Son Tinh district), were entirely smashed.

On 6 June 1975, the Trung Son Pagoda (Binh Phuoc Village) was seized.

On the same day, the Head Monk of the Unified Buddhist Church of Binh Phuoc was arrested and detained in the prison of Quang Ngai City.

All the money and furniture and a typewriter at a local training centre of the School of Youth for Social Service were confiscated (total value about 20,000 old piasters).

On 1 February 1976, people were told they are no longer allowed to go to the Buddhist Temple for worship.

#### BINH THUAN PROVINCE

All the land of Thein Lam Monastery, at Ham My Village, cultivated by the monks, was confiscated.

The Buddha's statue on Phu Hai hill, 9 metres high, was dynamited by cadres.

Laymen have been prevented from going to the Pagoda to worship.

During meetings, government cadres dissuade people from being practising Buddhists, saying that religion is superstition.

#### LONG CHAU TIEN PROVINCE

The authorities of Tan Chi Long Village came to Lap Phuc Pagoda and confiscated all the holy scriptures, books, typewriters, and everything they found.

On 18 August 1975, the authorities of Tan Chi Long held a meeting where they called for all the religious people to

be re-educated. In that re-education session, people were ordered to sign papers dissociating themselves from the Church.

#### KIEN GIANG PROVINCE

The whole supply of rice grown by monks of the Van Hoa Temple during 1975 (566 gia) was confiscated on 3 November 1975.

#### TUYEN DUC PROVINCE

In September 1975, the Tung Nghia authorities forced the Buddhist workers to turn over all schools and day-care centres to the government.

Immediately after the liberation of Saigon, the Union of Students and Pupils of the National Liberation Front, Saigon Gia Dinh branch, seized the buildings of the Quang Duc Youth Centre for their office and for stocking weapons which they collected on the streets. The monk in charge of the youth centre was left only one small room. But at 2.30 a.m. on 6 September 1975, the police came and raided the centre and invited the monk to see three grenades and a flag of the former regime found in the centre. The monk protested in vain and refused to sign the police report which admitted responsibility for the weapons. He was detained for seven hours, and when he was released the Quang Duc Centre had been "borrowed" (confiscated) by the government.

#### PHAN THIET PROVINCE

The Phan Thiet Unified Buddhist Church reported that all permission to organize prayer meetings at the temples had been refused by the government, except for the Wesak Day (one day only each year). The government must be informed about the programme of that day in advance.

#### BINH TUY PROVINCE

On Wesak Day of 1975, people were prevented from coming to the pagodas. Ways to the main temple were barricaded and people attempting to go were threatened with arrest.

#### HO CHI MINH CITY

The authorities of the 7th District, in a communiqué dated 16 May 1975, an-

nounced that all meetings at private houses, meetings inside Buddhist temples or Catholic churches for religious worship are forbidden if permission to hold the meetings is not given in advance. (Communiqué number 01/HC7, 16 May 1975, UBND CM Quan 7, P.1). The Phu Xuan Pagoda, at Nha Be District, Gia Dinh, Ho Chi Minh City, was seized and transformed into a storehouse on 27 July 1976.

#### HAU GIANG PROVINCE

In a communiqué dated 18 June 1976, the local government demanded that the Unified Buddhist Church request permission ten days in advance every time the Church wanted to gather people for worship. In the application, the Buddhists were ordered to submit programmes of worship, to describe the kinds of people who would come to the meeting, the number of followers, the names of the invited guests, and biographies of the Buddhist dignitaries. All the orders from the Central Executive Council of the Unified Buddhist Church should be reported to the local government. Every decision to elect a new representative, or to send a delegate to a new area, should be discussed in advance with the authorities.

#### KIEN PHONG

The entrance gate of Hoa Long Pagoda is guarded and people who go through the gate are checked.

#### HO CHI MINH CITY

On 5 September 1976, the person responsible for the "Patriotic Buddhist Organization" (an organization set up by the government) in the 3rd District, in a letter of invitation to a meeting said that: "Those who refuse to come to the meeting will have their names reported to the Security Forces of the Fatherland Front of the District."

#### KIEN GIANG

Miss Dieu Hai, who helped with the work in the kitchen of the temple, was arrested and detained for 24 hours. During that time she was forced to declare that at night the abbot of the monastery came and forced his way into her room.

#### DONG NAI

On Sunday, 21 November 1976, the Head Monk of the Dau Giay Unified Buddhist Church was told that he had ten minutes to cancel the prayer service due to take place that day, and that regular services would not be allowed in the future.

#### THU DUC, HO CHI MINH CITY

During a meeting between the Security Police of the 8th District and the UBC on 22 November 1976, the Buddhists were told the following:

The Unified Buddhist Church is the CIA itself, created by imperialist Americans.

The Unified Buddhist Church is against the Revolution. Only the Patriotic Buddhist Organization has the right to exist.

#### PHU KHANH (formerly Phu Yen)

Mr Minh Chi of the Fatherland Front of Tuy Hoa City wrote to the Bao Tinh Pagoda to urge 11 clergymen of this religious community to return to lay life (27 November 1976). He also came to the pagoda and told the monks that if they did not follow his orders they would be removed by force from the pagoda by the police.

The Venerable Thich Quang Dat, Abbot of the Bao Tinh Pagoda, was repeatedly threatened with arrest if he delayed urging the other monks to sign papers asking to return to lay life.

#### HO CHI MINH CITY

Mr Dang Thien, head of the Fatherland Front of the 11th District, summoned the Head Monk of the Unified Buddhist Church of the 11th District to his office on 17 December 1976, and told him that: "The Unified Buddhist Church is not recognized by the government. You cannot go on with your activities if you have no permission to do so."

#### MINH HAI PROVINCE (formerly CA MAU)

The Thien Ton Pagoda in Ben Hao Village, Ngoc Hien District, was used by the government as a military recruiting centre. On the night of 20 September 1976, the Buddha statue was removed from the main shrine and thrown into

the river. The local Unified Buddhist Church protested but without effect. In a meeting at Ca Mau, the government of Canau rejected the executive committee of the Unified Buddhist Church (UBC), which had recently been elected by the people of Canau and accepted by the Central Executive Council of the UBC.

#### DONG NAI PROVINCE

The government of Dau Giay District dissolved a prayer meeting at Khanh Lam Pagoda on 1 September 1976. The government confiscated the campus of the Bao Son Temple to build a school. The Phap Hoa Pagoda was transformed into an office. Fourteen monks have been detained.

#### BINH TUY

The head of the Unified Buddhist Church, the Venerable Thich Quang Thanh, was arrested and detained at Tanh Linh for more than three months.

*The following letter, dated 28 November 1975, was written by the president of the Central Executive Council of the Unified Buddhist Church, the Most Ven. Thich Tri Thu.*

#### Office

243 Su Van Hanh  
Saigon 10

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PROVISIONAL  
REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDUM OF THE  
CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL  
LIBERATION FRONT OF SOUTH VIETNAM

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MILITARY COM-  
MITTEE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF HO CHI  
MINH CITY

*The violation of the Front and Revolu-  
tionary Government's policy of freedom  
of worship*

Dear Messrs Chairmen,

On 2 November 1975 in Can Tho Province, 12 Buddhist monks and nuns tragically burned themselves collec-

tively to protest against the local authorities' violation of the policy of "Freedom of Worship" maintained by the National Liberation Front and Revolutionary Government. Here below is the cause of this action.

Every year on the 21st day of the ninth month of the lunar calendar, at the Duoc Su Zen Monastery located at Tan Long A hamlet, Tan Binh village, Phung Hiep District, Can Tho Province, a commemorative service is held for the nun Dieu Hau who immolated herself by fire on the same date of the year Nham Ty (1972) to pray for peace. In 1974 on the same memorial day, another nun named Dieu Nguyen immolated herself in the same manner to call for peace. Because of this coincidence, this year, to commemorate the sacrifice of two nuns for peace, the Duoc Su Monastery planned to organize a commemorative service from the 19th to the 21st of the ninth lunar month of the At Mao year (23-25 October 1975). However the local authorities forbade the holding of the service.

On 24 October 1975 the revolutionary committee of Tan Binh village summoned the Ven. Thich Hue Hien, Abbot of the Duoc Su Monastery, to its administrative headquarters and forced him to carry out the six following points:

1. Display of the Buddhist flag in front of the monastery is formally prohibited.
2. Inclusion of religious praying for President Ho Chi Minh and the dead liberation fighters in the rituals is formally prohibited.
3. Monks and nuns are not allowed to go into religious retreat and observe silence. They must eat and talk normally so as to learn the way of the Revolution.
4. The Abbot is responsible for expounding the glorious, historical, and great victory of the Revolution among the monks and nuns of the monastery.
5. Monks and nuns are required to participate in the political activities of revolutionary organizations.
6. Acceptance and admission of followers who leave or stay in their homes for their faith is formally prohibited.



Realizing that they could not comply with the harsh restrictions imposed by the Tan Binh village revolutionary committee, the 12 members of the Duoc Su Monastery chose death as a way of liberation. At midnight on the 29th of the ninth month of the At Mao year (2 November 1975) all of them immolated themselves by fire, leaving behind a testimonial letter stating their seven wishes. Following this tragedy, the local authorities quarantined the Duoc Su Monastery and confiscated the charred remains of the monks and nuns. Three days after, upon learning that their master – the Ven. Thich Hue Hien – had immolated himself, the nun Dieu Hoa (lay name Pham Thi Chuoc), the nun Dieu Bau (lay name Nhan, family name unknown) and the lay woman Vu Bach Tuyet (Buddhist name Dieu Nga) came to the monastery. They were then arrested and transported to an undisclosed place. Besides this there are still many other details related to this incident, too heart-rending for description here.

Messrs Chairmen,

We report to you the above in the hope that you and the Revolutionary Government will pay more attention to what is happening at the infrastructure level. We do not want to believe that the above regrettable incident, as many other ones related to freedom of religion elsewhere in the country, reflects the policy of the Front and Government. We do hope that this is only the over-zealousness and error of some cadres at grass-root level. We have not lost our faith in the Revolution, therefore we hereby state to you and to the government our following wishes:

1. Please instruct cadres at grass-root level to respect the people's right to freedom of worship as guaranteed by the Front and Revolutionary Government in written documents.
2. Please deal properly with those responsible for the tragic incident at the Duoc Su Monastery.
3. Please release all those arrested upon their visit to the monastery.
4. Please end the quarantine of the Duoc Su Monastery and return it to our Church.

5. Please find effective measures to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents elsewhere.

Messrs Chairmen,

We should have come to you direct to present the case with fuller details and in a more discreet manner than the sending of this letter. However a meeting of that type seems to be impossible because, since the complete liberation of South Vietnam, we have requested an interview with you three times to state our Church's position on religious matters, and our request has been repeatedly rejected. Nevertheless, we remain ever ready to furnish you with further details on the above incident as well as on other ones in a direct encounter if you deem it necessary.

With all our sincerity, we wish you good health to lead the Front and Government so that peace and happiness be realized for our people.

Please accept our thanks and greetings.

Respectfully yours,

The Most Ven. THICH TRI THU,  
President of the Executive  
Council of the Unified  
Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

*On 3 March 1977 the following communiqué from the general secretary of the UBC's Central Executive Council was addressed to the Buddhist faithful.*

Office  
243 Su Van Hanh  
Ho Chi Minh City 10

COMMUNIQUE

RESPECTFULLY TO:

UNIFIED BUDDHIST CHURCH EXECUTIVE  
COMMITTEES OF ALL LEVELS  
ALL VENERABLE MONKS AND NUNS OF HO  
CHI MINH CITY

*Regarding the illegal confiscation of the Quach Thi Trang Centre by the government.*

Dear Venerables,

On the morning of 3 March 1977, a group of persons, acting in the name of

the authorities of the 10th District, came to "take over and administer" the Quach Thi Trang Centre. They rudely pulled down the sign of our Church. This was done without having informed the Central Executive Council beforehand.

The Church has presented the problem to the People's Committee of the City and to the Administration Committee of the 10th District, requesting these Committees to intervene and to provide a just solution. While we are waiting for the competent authorities to solve the problem, the Central Executive Council calls upon the executive committees of all levels and all monks and nuns of Ho Chi Minh City to remain calm, to wait, and observe absolutely every order made by the Central Executive Council.

During the last two years, a number of statues of the Buddha have been destroyed, a number of pagodas have been taken over in many areas and a large number of monks and nuns have been detained. Now, in this very city, our Church is being humiliated.

For the survival of Buddhism and the dignity of our Church, the Central Executive Council calls on all Venerable monks and nuns to be ready to act, to sacrifice themselves if necessary, in case the government does not consent to solve our problems.

For the Most Venerable President of the Central Executive Council  
the General Secretary of the  
Central Executive Council

THICH QUANG DO

*The president of the UBC's Central Executive Council appealed to the Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, on behalf of some Buddhist monks who had been arrested. His letter is dated 3 March 1977.*

An Quang Pagoda  
243 Su Van Hanh  
Ho Chi Minh City 10

TO PRIME MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG, HANOI

Mr Prime Minister,

Since the day of total liberation, a number of clergymen affiliated with our Church have been arrested and detained

by local authorities. As far as we know, the monks whose names appear on the attached list have not been freed to date, nor have they been tried. We do not know what kind of crime they are supposed to have committed.

The Dinty New Year is coming; we respectfully request that these clergymen be released temporarily, pending examination of each case. We hope that their cases will be examined soon, so that the innocent can return to their normal lives and contribute to the task of reconstruction.

Respectfully,  
THICH TRI THU

*On 6 April 1977 the Vietnamese police were ordered by the government to raid the An Quang Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City. This was the headquarters of the UBC. Six of the UBC's leaders were arrested. The following document, dated 25 April 1977, was written by the president of the UBC's Central Executive Council.*

Office  
243 Su Van Hanh  
Ho Chi Minh City 10

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT OF  
THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL CONCERNING  
THE VENERABLES ARRESTED AND DETAINED

RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED TO:

MOST VENERABLES, VENERABLE MONKS  
AND NUNS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES OF THE CHURCH  
ON ALL LEVELS

ALL LAY MEMBERS OF THE BUDDHIST  
CHURCH

In order to dissipate the doubts and rumours that are unfavourable, we wish to inform you that:

On 6 April 1977 government authorities arrested and still detain the Venerables whose names appear below:

*Thich Huyen Quang, Vice-President of  
the Executive Council of the Church*

*Thich Quang Do, Secretary General of  
the Executive Council of the Church*

*Thich Thuyen An*, Head of the Department for the Dissemination of the Dharma

*Thich Thong Buu*, Head of the Department for Lay Member Organizations

*Thich Thong Hue*, Head of the Committee representative of the Buddhists of Go Vap District, Ho Chi Minh City

Head of the Committee for Self-support for monks and nuns

*Thich Thanh The*, Head of the Inspection Corps of the Committee for Self-support for monks and nuns

Efforts have been made to locate and to visit our detained Venerables and to bring them basic necessities but we have not yet obtained permission to visit them. Until now, we have only been allowed to transmit basic necessities to them twice. According to the authorities, we will be able to visit them once the formalities are finished.

We appeal to our Most Venerables and our Venerable monks and nuns, the Executive Committees of all levels of our Church as well as all our lay members, to maintain calmness and join in prayer for the safety of our brother Venerables who are being detained.

Respectfully yours,  
THICH TRI THU

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*After the arrest of the six UBC leaders on 6 April 1977, the local authorities in Hue, fearing a public outcry, organized a meeting on 15 April to explain and justify the government's action. Several prominent religious leaders, who had made favourable comments about the new government, were invited to speak. The following speech was made by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Hue, Nguyen Kim Dien.*

ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND EQUALITY  
OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Gentlemen in the Presidium,  
Dear fellow delegates,

I have just learned about the event [the arrest of the six leaders of the Unified

Buddhist Church (UBC)], through the information just given to us by the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City and by the Commissioner of the Fatherland Front of our province. I have also heard Mr Tran Van Long [a government official from Ho Chi Minh City] saying that strong measures had to be taken in this case, and I have heard his explanation of the event, and his view that it should be publicized to people in all walks of life. Meanwhile, the Ven. Thich Thanh Tri [the Unified Buddhist Church representative in Hue] has requested that the government treat the arrested monks in a tolerant way, and suggested that this meeting, gathering representatives of the people from all walks of life, should be sufficient [in publicizing the government's explanation of the arrests].

Personally, I have no comment. I think it is the job of the government to decide whether or not to publicize their actions.

Yet I want to share the suffering of my Buddhist colleagues. I had similar experiences during the Vinh Son affair [a government raid on the Vinh Son Church in Ho Chi Minh City, when Catholic priests and laymen were charged with a conspiracy against the government]. I am sure that no one in this meeting accepts the kind of action described in the government communiqué. And one cannot help but suffer when this happens to people who have religious faith in common. How can one describe our feelings? Only those who have experienced suffering know what it is like. [...] Frankly, I am not yet satisfied with government policy concerning freedom of religion.

The government has said many times, "If there are things that make you unhappy, report them to the government; do not publicize the news among the people, do not talk among the people." Because of this, today, I want to be sincere, hoping that my sincerity before the Fatherland Front of the Province will cause no one to label me "reactionary". [...]

I want to talk about two things only: 1) freedom of religion, and 2) equality of civil rights.

[...] Permit me to tell you the Roman Catholic view concerning the two above points.

1. *On religious freedom.* After the day of Liberation, when I heard the government proclaim the policy of religious freedom, I was very happy and encouraged. This was reflected in my remarks made at that time. But two years have elapsed since then, and I no longer feel happy because freedom of religion does not really exist.

Services have been restricted, and Catholic priests prevented from circulating to serve the Catholic population, for example, in the New Economic Zones. There are churches which have been seized and others have been prevented from holding services. I appreciated the wisdom of the government when it proclaimed the policy of freedom of worship; this was stated clearly in the five decrees and communiqués on religion. But these are only the written proclamations. As for oral orders, they often contradict the spirit of the published proclamations. [...]

2. *Equality in civil rights.* During the last two years, let me be honest, Catholic citizens have not felt all right. Wherever they found themselves, whenever they did something, they always felt that they were suspected and oppressed.

At school, students always heard anti-Catholic teachings, and the teachers tried to smear Catholicism. [...]

Catholic workers, employees, teachers, social workers, even if they are recognized as good workers, cannot continue their jobs, just because they are *Catholic*. If you are a Catholic and are refused a job or have difficulties in continuing your job, and if you want to know the reason, you will be told privately that if you abandon Catholicism or stop going to church, things will go better for you.

During the Assembly of the Fatherland Front of Vietnam recently held in Ho Chi Minh City, a member of the Central Committee of the Fatherland Front made remarks that suggested to us that Catholics are regarded only as second class citizens.

The government contends that everybody is equal, that every ethnic group is equal. We are a people of 50 million. There are 45 million Kinh people [Vietnamese race] and from five to six million people belonging to about 60 ethnic groups. There are at least three million Catholics, yet in practice they do not have the right to equality in civil rights.

During the last two years, Catholics in our province made great efforts and the government could see it. As far as labour is concerned, they cannot be blamed. As far as elections are concerned, they are qualified and disciplined. The only thing we lack is equality in civil rights. The communiqué on the UBC leaders' arrest, issued by the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, says near the end that "The People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City and the government at all levels should apply fully the policy of freedom of religion confirmed by our government, to avoid violations and the abuse of the law". We have never wanted to abuse the law. [...] I think that if freedom of religion really existed, then no one could incite the people by calling on them to struggle against the suppression of religion. [...]

Thank you.

(These are ideas which I expressed in my remarks during the meeting of 15 April 1977, organized by the Fatherland Front of the Binh Tri Thien Province and the City of Hue, to announce the arrest by the government of six monks of the Unified Buddhist Church at the An Quang Pagoda. This was written down on 19 April. It is not a word-for-word record of the oral remarks, but I guarantee that the ideas and the order of their presentation are faithful to the original remarks.)

Hue, 19 April 1977

PHILIPPO NGUYEN KIM DIEN  
ARCHBISHOP OF HUE