

Advocates Pack - VIETNAM
January 2005

Advocate!

Thank you for becoming an advocate for persecuted Christians in Vietnam. In this pack, you will find information about Vietnam and the Christians that are currently imprisoned and suffering for Christ in that country. This pack is intended to equip Canadian Christians to pray more effectively for the persecuted, to write letters of encouragement to their suffering brothers and sisters, and to advocate on their behalf to both the Canadian and Vietnamese governments.

Country Profile – Vietnam



Official Name: The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Government Type: Communist State

President: Tran Duc Luong

Capital: Hanoi

Population: 82,689,518

Ethnicity: Vietnamese 85%-90%, Chinese, Hmong, Thai, Khmer, Cham, mountain groups.

Language: Vietnamese (official), English, some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)

Religion: Buddhist, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Christian (predominantly Roman Catholic, some Protestant), indigenous beliefs, Muslim

Persecution: Vietnam is one of the most tightly controlled nations in the world. Registration is required for all religious organizations. Churches that submit to registration are tightly controlled by the government. Those who do not register face the possibility of imprisonment, torture and death.

Writing Letters

Letter writing is a meaningful form of encouragement for the suffering, and an effective tool for advocacy. At this time, we encourage you to:

- Write to prisoners in Vietnam.
- Send Christian greetings, religious illustrations or scripture references to prisoners.
- Write to your MP.
- Write to Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Write to the Vietnamese Embassy in Canada.
- Write to the Vietnamese Government.
- Write to Vietnam's Representative to the United Nations.

PRISONER PROFILES

The following six Mennonites were convicted and sentenced at a joint trial held In Ho Chi Minh City on Nov. 12, 2004 on charges of “resisting persons doing official duty”.

- **Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang**, aged 45, is the Vice President and General Secretary of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam. He is a trained lawyer and an advocate for religious freedom. He was arrested on June 8, 2004 on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City and taken to the jail at the District 2 Public Security Police Station. Police ransacked his home and office and informed his colleagues that they were charging him with "inciting others to oppose persons carrying out official duties." They confiscated four computers and numerous books and papers, including his legal files on human rights cases. He has a wife, Le Thi Phu Dung and three young children - Huy-Gideon 9, Trieu-Daniel 8, and Anne, 2 years. Pastor Quang was sentenced to three years in prison on Nov. 12, 2004. His appeal to the People's Supreme Court will be heard Feb. 2, 2005.

- **Elder Nguyen Hieu Nghia**, a Mennonite elder in the house church congregation in Ho Chi Minh City's District 2, was arrested on March 2, 2004 when several dozen police officers armed with guns and electric cattle prods surrounded Pastor Quang's home, after Quang had discovered undercover policeman spying on him. Nghia was sentenced to nine months on Nov. 12 2004. When released in early December he reported serious abuse while in custody and is unable to work.

- **Evangelist Nguyen Thanh Nhan**, a Mennonite evangelist, was arrested on March 2, 2004 after going to the police station following reports of the beating of his brother Nghia. Sentenced on Nov. 12, 2004 to nine months, he was released in early December. He also reported being seriously abused and tortured during much of his time in prison. He is unable to work.

- **Evangelist Pham Ngoc Thach**, a Mennonite evangelist, was arrested on March 2, 2004 after going to the police station following reports of the beating of Elder Nghia. He had been with Pastor Quang when the undercover police officers were discovered. He was beaten so badly at the police station that he passed out. Afterwards police officers kicked him in the stomach, chest and groin. Sentenced on Nov. 12, 2004 to two years in prison, his appeal will be heard at the same time as Pastor Quang's on Feb. 2, 2005

- **Evangelist Nguyen Van Phuong**, a Mennonite evangelist, was arrested on March 2, 2004 after going to the police station following reports of the beating of Elder Nghia. He is married with an infant child. Phuong was sentenced to one year in prison on November 12, 2004 and has been moved to the Bo Vu Prison in Binh Phuoc Province to serve the rest of his term

- **Ms. Le Thi Hong Lien**, was arrested at 4 pm on Saturday, July 3, 2004, at her home in Binh Khanh Ward, District 2 of Ho Chi Minh City, just meters from the Mennonite center where Pastor Quang lived. Her house was searched and ransacked by the police. She was taken to District 2 Police Station and held without charge. Her family was not allowed visits for several months because, officials said, she is "hard-headed and uncooperative." She was sentenced to one year in prison at the Nov. 12, 2004 trial even though she appeared to have had a mental breakdown and was too weak to stand or speak. It is now clear that abuse and torture have caused a complete mental and physical breakdown. Her parents are again denied access to visit her. Other prisoners have reported seeing her staggering around naked in the Chi Hoa prison infirmary where she is held. Her family asks that Christian around the world speak on her behalf.

Pastor Kso Ti No, pastor of the Ia Grai congregation in Gia Lai province in the Central Highlands, and head of the Gia Lai Conference which includes 48 worship locations in six districts of the province with nearly 3,000 believers, was arrested on May 15, 2004 and detained at T20 detention camp in Gia Lai province. Charges are unknown.

He is the son of the late Pastor Kso Tik (died August 2004) and followed his father in church leadership. He has a wife and four children, and cares for his widowed mother. On August 18, 2004 it was reported that the families and congregational councils of the churches have many times gone to visit evangelist KsoTiNo at the detention camp T20, but the security police have not allowed anyone to meet with him, only allowing them to leave items there for him.

Evangelist Kso Pui Naih of Plei Breng III, leader of a Mennonite church in Ia Grai district of Gia Lai province, arrested and detained with Pastor Kso Ti No on May 15, 2004.

CATHOLIC HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

• **Father Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly**

Father Ly, 56, is a Roman Catholic priest who is a leading human rights and religious freedom activist in Vietnam. He was arrested in May 2001 and, after a trial without a defence lawyer or public audience, was sentenced to 15 years in solitary confinement followed by five years on probation. His sentence has been reduced twice by five years on each occasion, yet he is not scheduled for release until 2006. He is being held in harsh conditions of solidarity confinement.

Father Ly has peacefully campaigned for more than 30 years for improved religious freedom in his country. He had previously spent ten years in prison for “opposing the revolution and destroying the people’s unity.”

In a written testimony submitted to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom in February 2001, he called on the Communist Government, to make significant improvements to religious freedom. He called on officials to allow the churches to appoint their own priests, to stop listing a person’s religious affiliation on their ID card, to return property confiscated from the church and to release those held for their religious beliefs.

HMONG CHURCH LEADERS

Many Hmong Christian leaders are imprisoned as a result of the long, systematic and cruel campaign to “stop and reverse” the move towards Christianity amongst the Hmong minority in Vietnam’s northwest provinces. In spite of persistent denials about religious liberty abuses by the authorities, the anti-Christian campaign continues unabated. Many Hmong believers are imprisoned and a number have been killed in detention.

The following four prisoners were arrested in late 2003 for “disturbing the public order” after holding weekly worship meetings in their home. They were sentenced in March 2004. They are all from Giap Trung Village, Thang Tin Commune, in Ha Giang Province where an intensified anti-Christian campaign is being conducted. It is reported that they are being held under very harsh conditions.

• **Ly Chin Sang** was sentenced for 3 years. He is 60 and he has a wife, Giang Thi Ca, and a 19-year-old son at home.

• **Ly Sin Quang** is the son of the Ly Chin Sang. He was sentenced to 26 months. He and his wife, Vang Thi Da, have four young children.

• **Vang Chin Sang** was sentenced to 3 years. He and his wife, Vang Thi Di, have a 13-year-old son at home.

• **Vang My Ly** was sentenced to 26 months. He is 24 and he and his wife, Ma Thi Di, have three small children.

MONTAGNARD CHRISTIANS

Highland minority Christians, numbering some 500,000, are the largest Evangelical Protestant group in Vietnam. Considered illegal since 1975, they are suffering a wave of oppression and persecution that has driven hundreds to neighbouring Cambodia and hundreds more have fled their homes to the forests in

Vietnam. The vast majority are still denied effective association with the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South), the future remains bleak. Authorities seek to force Christians to give up their faith and participate in a ceremony called "Repenting of Following Christianity".

Montagnard Christians suffer serious repression and abuse of human rights. Religious liberty is one of the main issues. There are many Montagnard Christians imprisoned in the Central Highlands. They are held on political charges, most of which are false. Over Easter 2004 Montagnard protests were violently suppressed, leaving many injured, missing or dead. Others have fled to the jungle and neighbouring Cambodia.

TAKE ACTION

Tips for Writing to Christian Prisoners

- Always be encouraging and respectful
- Do not, under any circumstances, discuss the political situation of their country.
- If possible, write short phrases or Bible verses in their language.
- It is fine to write the letter in English. Even if the intended recipient cannot read your letter, he will often know fellow prisoners who can read English, and your letter will be an encouragement and witness to the translator as well.
- Do not expect to build a "pen pal" relationship. There is no guarantee that your letter will ever be responded to, but know that if the prisoner were able to respond, s/he probably would.
- Pray that God would give you the right words to communicate and that God would use your letter to further the work of His kingdom and provide encouragement to those who are suffering for their faith.

Tips for Writing Effective Letters to the Government

- Always be respectful and affirm any positive action the government has taken.
 - If you feel strongly about an issue, you may tend to write a letter that is not "seasoned with salt." One idea is to have someone else read your letter before you send it. Or, wait for 24 hours before you send it.
 - Always be sure you send it to the right people involved with the issue.
 - When sending a letter to a government Minister, also send a copy of the letter to your MP.
 - Canadian government representatives need to know that many Canadians know and care about religious freedom in Vietnam
 - Expressing yourself in print and personally can be very helpful for those who receive them to understand the extent of your concern. The process of writing a letter is also helpful to enable you to understand and articulate your concerns. A form letter can also be effective.
 - Make sure that you include your name and contact information including address and postal code
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Addresses

VIETNAMESE MENNONITE PRISONERS IN VIETNAM

Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang

(His wife is Le Thi Phu Dung. They have three children, Gideon, Daniel and Anne)
C5/1H Tran Nao, Khu Pho 1
Phuong Binh Khanh, Quan 2
Ho Chi Minh City
Vietnam

Evangelist Pham Ngoc Thach

Family address :
Mr. Le Van Thanh
Thon 17, Xa Hoa Khanh
Cu Jut District, Dak Lak Province
Vietnam

Evangelist Nguyen van Phuong

(He has a wife and a newborn child)
Mother's address :
Mrs. Pham Thi Phuong Trang
25b/4, Khu Pho 10, Phuong Tan Bien,
Bien Hoa, Dong Nai Province
Vietnam

Evangelist (Ms) Le Thi Hong Lien

Father's address is:
Le Quang Danh
19/5 Dien Bien Phu
Phuong 15, Quan Binh Thanh
Ho Chi Minh City
Vietnam

Evangelist Nguyen Thanh Nhan and Elder Nguyen Huu Nghia (bothers)

Mother's address is:
Mrs. Quang Thi Kim Lan
Hop Thu 70, Buu Dien Tan Hiep
Kien Giang Province
Vietnam

CANADIAN AUTHORITIES

Your MP

Find out who your MP is by using your postal code at:
www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/house/PostalCode.asp?Source=SM.

Find contact information for all MPs at:
www.parl.gc.ca/common/SenatorsMembers_house.asp?Language=E&Parl=37&Ses=1&Sect=hoccur

Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Honourable Pierre Pettigrew
Minister of Foreign Affairs
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Fax: 613-996-3443
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Canadian Ambassador to Vietnam

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VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES

In Canada

Her Excellency Hoi Thi Nguyen, Ambassador
Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
470 Wilbrod St.
Ottawa, ON K1N 6M8
Phone: (613) 236-0772
Fax: (613) 236-2704
E-mail: vietem@istar.ca

In Vietnam

His Excellency Pham Van Khai, Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Hoang Hoa Tham Street
Hanoi
VIETNAM
Fax + 84 4 823 4137

Mr. Ngo Yen Thi, Director
Government Bureau of Religious Affairs
53 Trang Thi, Hoan Kiem
Hanoi
VIETNAM
Fax: +84 4825 6300

At the UN

His Excellency Le Luong Minh, Ambassador
Permanent Mission of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 435, New York, NY 10017
Tel: (212) 644-0594 (212) 644 0831 (212) 644 1564
Fax: (212) 644-5732
E-mail: vietnam@un.int

Sample Letters

TO A PRISONER

Dear (Name),

I have heard about your time in prison and are greatly encouraged by what you are willing to endure to remain true to our Lord Jesus. I thank God for your love of Christ. I am praying today that God will strengthen and encourage you, and that you will feel the arms of our Lord surrounding you. I pray that your witness will lead many to Jesus and that your guards will come to understand that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, so that we might spend eternity with Him in heaven. My prayers are with you as you endure the fellowship of suffering. The Lord is your shepherd and He will be with you.

Love from your Sister (or Brother).

(Signed)

Possible verses to include:

Psalm 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

1 Peter 4:13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

TO A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL OF VIETNAM

Dear (Name):

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the arrest and imprisonment of (name), who was arrested in (month and year) and imprisoned at (name of prison if available).

(Name) and other Christians in your country are not a threat to the government. The Bible teaches us to respect our leaders and to pray for them. It is my hope that you truly value freedom of religion and desire it for all the people of Vietnam. The immediate release of (name) would demonstrate to the world that citizens in your country are able to practice their religion freely.

In the interest of religious harmony and for the protection of the rights of all Vietnamese people, I urge you and your government to release (name) and clear him (or her) of all charges.

We are praying for you as a leading representative for your country.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed)
