



**COMMITTEE FOR SOLIDARITY
OF VIETNAMESE CATHOLICS**

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Independence - Freedom – Happiness**

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REPORT

On implementing the assurance of rights of Vietnamese Catholic community

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For 30 years representing the patriotic movement of Vietnam Catholics, the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics has affirmed that: Vietnamese Catholics are encouraged to strengthen the protection of human rights by the State, implement the rights of followers as prescribed by International Law.

Although Vietnam is not a state inventing the term "human rights", the categories of Human Rights and Humanity are stick together. Humanity contains Human rights and vice versa. Vietnamese people love peace, justice and human and open values, which are diverse and integrated into the human culture. The history has proved that: Vietnamese people have fought for independence and freedom for their life. "Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and in fact has become a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their freedom and independence ⁽¹⁾”

Thus, each Vietnamese person in general and each Vietnamese Catholic in particular have been aware of the value of human rights and humanity, so their volunteer implementation of human rights is their ideal of life. To understand clearly human rights for Catholics in Vietnam, the Committee for solidary of Vietnamese Catholics has referred to the following issues:

1. Implementing rights of freedom of belief and religion

Article 70 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam stipulates that "Citizens have the right to freedom of belief, religion or non-religion. All religions are

equal before the law. The worship places of all faiths and religions are protected by law. No one can violate freedom of belief, religion or abuse beliefs and religions to contravene the law and State policies⁽²⁾". The above Constitution has been highly appreciated by UNPO: the Vietnam government should be praised as it put down some basic rights as freedom of religion in its Constitution and approved International Standards on human rights. The Vietnamese State has considered beliefs and religions as inevitable demand of human beings and constantly strive to ensure religion and belief life for its people.

- ***Ensuring the religion building and organization:*** Catholic Church in Vietnam has 26 dioceses in 3 provinces across Vietnam. Vietnam Episcopal Council is the highest leading agency of the Catholic Church in Vietnam setting the pastoral direction "Living out the Gospel in the midst of the Nation to serve the welfare of the people" (General mail of 1980)

- ***Ensuring the religious activities:*** Catholics publicly attend religious ceremonies in places of worship. The State pays attention to, visits and encourages as well as congratulates Catholics in such important occasions as Christmas, helping Catholic Church to organize Year of God 2010, Congress of God, Asian Congress of Co-Bishops, etc.

- ***Ensuring extension of missionary:*** After Catholicism has been imported in Vietnam for nearly 500 years, 7 million of indigenous people have received ideology of Catholicism. In 1960, there were 2,094,640 Catholics, accounting for about 6.93% of the population, and for 7 years from 2000 to 2007, the number of people who have received the sacrament of baptism at adulthood were more than 35,000 persons/year. This is really a big figure. Bui Chu (Nam Dinh) – Phat Diem (Ninh Binh province) and Xuan Loc (Dong Nai) are now home to Catholic followers in Vietnam at the rate of 10% of the population.

In parallel with the resettlement policy, Catholicism is welcomed by minorities of mountainous North West provinces and Highlands such as Son La, Yen Bai, Cao Bang, Lam Dong, Dak Lak, etc. Many dioceses and parishes have been founded; numerous dioceses have been raised into parishes, which are managed by priests; now Catholics have not to go far away to attend the prosperity ceremony. To meet the aspirations of the Catholic minority, the State has facilitated legal procedures, allocated land to build places of worship and restructured clean and beautiful Cathedral. Specifically, in 2009, Vo Nhiem Bui Chu Major Seminary (Xuan Truong, Nam Dinh) was founded, began enrollment and training priests of Session 1 of 2010. The launch of the Major Seminary affirmed the spirit and determination of the Church and support as well as consent of the State of Vietnam on ensuring freedom of religion rights of followers.

- *Ensuring the development of missionaries*: the training of seminarians and clergymen to become priests is the duty of minor seminary and major seminary, which is focused on human, intellectual, moral and pastoral training in the period of 6-8 years. The State does not intervene in the training and facilitate the ordain of priests and bishops. Up to now, there have been 108 bishops, including 5 receiving Cardinal. Obviously, the Church has never had such a large number of bishops, priests, seminarians, clergymen and catechists. Most cathedrals and old facilities have been restored. Many cathedrals and new facilities have been newly constructed. The difficulties and limitations of the admission of congregations and major seminaries as well as the ordain of basic priests, etc have been solved. Seminaries, academies of congregation, as well as the pastoral center of Dioceses are in a normal operation.

2. Performance of other human rights

Human right in Vietnam is determined as the combination of all social relations to enforce human rights in Vietnam. Therefore, the Government of Vietnam also recognized International declaration on human rights as universal values and signed a commitment to comply with International Covenant on civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights.

In addition, Vietnamese Catholics are citizens and part of Vietnamese people. Therefore, the Vietnamese Catholics are not only taken care of their spiritual life, freedom of religion and belief, but also guaranteed civil rights as equal as other citizens of the country by the State. This is stipulated in Chapter V of the Constitution. Some basic rights are presented herein:

- *Ensuring press freedom*: in Vietnam, there have been 55 publishers, over 700 newspaper offices with nearly 900 publications, 68 radio stations, televisions, hundreds of online newspapers and thousands of online news pages. Information network is constantly updated and a forum for the community to show a common voice. In particular, many of which represent a particular voice of the religious lives, namely Vietnamese Catholics newspaper, Catholic and National newspaper, Communion magazine of the Vietnam Bishop Council.

- *Ensuring freedom of speech*: going hand in press freedom, all citizens are involved in giving comments under various forms. State agencies, hospitals and schools have suggestion boxes where receive comments of people. Some government agencies such as the people's Committee, Vietnam Fatherland Front have a citizen-reception room to listen their aspirations and proposals. It is also one of four specified tasks in the Charter of the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics: "Gathering and reflecting legitimate aspirations of faithful persons to the Party, State, Vietnam Fatherland Front to protect the legitimate rights and interests of Catholics"

- *Ensuring the right to participate in the State and society management*: The State encourages priests, clergymen, and Catholics to participate in social work such as National Assembly, People Council, Vietnamese Fatherland Front and other social organizations; and to give comments on legal document system for nation-building. Of which, the gathering of comments from people of all strata, including Catholics for the revised draft of the 1992 Constitution has been conducted recently.

- *Ensuring the right to participate in education and health work*: Catholics, dignitaries who are citizens qualified under particular regulations of the health and education sector are accepted by the State to participate in health, education work to solve problems of the society. Various kindergartens, elementary schools, hospitals have been opened by the active and effective religions, namely hospital..... (Bui Chu), Anh Duong Private Kindergarten (Phaolo - Hanoi), Anh Dao National Standard Private Kindergarten (Immaculate - Hue), Binh Minh Private Kindergarten (District 2, Ho Chi Minh city)...

- The right to participate in charitable activities: The State calls and encourages individuals and organizations to be actively involved in charitable work and promote humanitarian tradition of “Good leaves protect torn ones” of the Vietnamese people.

Most dioceses have established Caristas to contribute to daily porridge for poor patients, providing free lodging for poor students, voluntarily fostering orphans, disabled children, taking care of people infected HIV/AIDS, etc. Even in many localities, Catholics have generated, specified their charitable movements in line with actual circumstances, namely corneal donation movement³ (Ninh Binh). This result somewhat shows the closed relationship between Catholics and the Vietnamese community.

3. Some challenges and limitations in ensuring human rights of Vietnamese Catholics

Assurance of human rights is of a prime target for each country, including Vietnam. To this ends, Vietnam strives to improve its synchronous legal system as well as research and learn experience of the advanced countries in the world. However, there remain some challenges and limitations in the implementation of the assurance of rights of religious people:

- From taking advantage of religion, enemy forces always define "religious freedom" as the main priority in their policy toward Vietnam, they sought all means to separate religions from management of the State, destroying the building and protection of Vietnam with their focus on some main activities: First, seeking the support and passing legal statutes to take advantage of religious problems for their intervention and sabotage. Second, tolerating, supporting reactionary forces in overseas religious

Vietnamese people to organize activities against Vietnam. Third, supporting, inciting and directing extreme domestic religious objects to organize activities against Vietnam. It can be said that these activities are in fact violating the human rights of Catholics because it goes against the legitimate aspirations of Catholics with the direction of Vietnam Bishops Council of "*Living out the Gospel in the midst of the Nation* to serve the welfare of the people⁽⁴⁾".

- From taking advantage of land disputes, hostiles fight against the government, instigating and inciting Catholics to participate in political demonstrations, destabilizing the social order, creating a pretext for external hostile forces to intervene. Land is the common property of the people, including the Catholic population. The State guarantees freedom to live and reside by allocation of land for individuals, collective groups for use, granting the land use rights certificate for citizens or collective heads as citizens of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. On the other hand, in the society, the human beings always have a relationship with each other, rights going in hand with interests. In other words, the interests of each citizen cannot be separated from the benefit of the country and nation. Rights of the individuals cannot be guaranteed if benefits of the nation are not ensured.

With regards to the clarification of the role of the dispute settlement in use and management of land relating to religion, on 06 January 2009, the Government's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung issued Directive 1940/CT-TTg requiring the competent agencies to make review of the master plan of the management and use of land and prompt resolution of religion-related issues on the spirit "of ensuring the harmony between religious interests with the nation's"

- Some religious facilities require opening schools and hospitals but their conditions does not meet separate regulations of the education and health sector in terms of professional qualifications and appropriate facilities. Therefore, the State cannot meet the interests of these facilities to ensure the overall happiness of the community. However, the State encourages and creates favorable conditions for these religious facilities to meet the regulations on taking care of people's health and fostering talents for the country.

- Some comments condemn that Vietnam still maintains the death penalty, which is a violation of the human right to life: People have the right to live, pursuit happiness, so nobody has the right to take the lives of others. It is a truth recognized worldwide. However, to ensure citizens' right to life, the death penalty is considered as dissuasive sanctions to educate others. This penalty is also applied in various countries and necessary for a country on the construction of socialism.

- Relationship between the State and the Catholic Church: there have been various meetings and visits on numerous issues between two parties. For the first time in the history of relations between the two countries, Pope Benedict XVI welcomed Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong on Tuesday 22 January 2013- the day that the Pope does not welcome guests – with the ceremony for the country leader. Two parties reached many agreements in their discussions. However, the parties did not agree on such issues as property reimbursement, the role of Cathedral in education and establishment objective of diplomatic relations between the Vatican - Hanoi.

In Vietnam, missionary history and consequences of prolonged war cause differences in the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church in Vietnam. This relationship is closer in the Southern region and some South central provinces. However, Catholics are aware that the Church is standing in a new stage of history. God is inviting followers to express his love for people by both the personalities of a changing country and personalities of Catholics responsible for contributing to the country development with the spirit of the Gospel: "As citizens of a country, Vietnamese Catholics have a duty to love and build the country. At the same time, we have the duty to implement the tasks with the spirit of the Gospel by our sincere and responsible voice, implementing the love with truth and implementing truth with love⁵". Christianity is an incarnation religion and the Church cannot stand on the history sidelines or out of earth.

To cut a long story short, in Vietnam, Catholics live by the Gospel of Christ, Catholic citizens live by policies and regimes of ensuring the right to life of the society. The State strives to ensure human rights for all citizens by political system, views, and directions and punishment for anti-revolutionary forces and human rights violation. All of them are aimed at stabilizing the socio-political situation so that rights of each person, including Catholics are executed and promoted.

Footnotes:

(1): *Charter of the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics*

(2): *Declaration of Independence 1945*

(3): *The 1992 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*

(4): *General mail of Vietnam Bishops Council of 1980*

(5): *General mail of post-God's People General Assembly in 2010*

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(Signed)

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