

Hoa Hao Buddhist Church

National Board

Add: An Hoa Tu Pagoda, Phu My town, Phu Tan district, An Giang province

Tel:

An Giang, 13 June 2013

REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE FREEDOM TO RELIGIONS OF VIET NAM AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HOA HAO BUDDHIST CHURCH IN VIET NAM (CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMPILATION OF OHCHR'S FINDINGS FOR VIET NAM'S UPR)

I. Introduction on Hoa Hao Buddhism

Hoa Hao Buddhism is a big religion, founded by Master Duc Huynh in 1939. At the moment, this religion has more than 3200 personnel working for the Board of the Church at different levels and more than 1.300.000 followers in 14 provinces in the southern part of Viet Nam. In terms of the number of followers, Hoa Hao Buddhism ranks fourth in Viet Nam, after Buddhism, Christianity and Cao Dai.

Under the sound policy on freedom of religions and beliefs of the Government and with the great support from the authorities and the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, on the 21st of June 1999, the State of Viet Nam recognized the legal status of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. Since then, the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church has successfully organized three National Congresses of the Church and Local Congresses in 1999, 2004 and 2009. The National Congresses elected the National Board and the Local Congresses elected the Local Boards. The National Board acts on behalf of all followers to uphold the Charter and Resolutions of the Religion adopted at the National Congresses.

Hoa Hao Buddhist Church pursues the principle of “Religious Teaching for the Nation”, focusing on spreading the teaching of Master Huynh, considering philanthropy works as the backbone of the Church.

II. Results of the protection and promotion of the freedom to religions of viet Nam and the activities of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church in Viet Nam

The State of Viet Nam has always upheld the policy to protect and promote freedom of religion and belief since its establishment in 1946. The Constitution and law of Viet Nam stipulate that all citizens have freedom of religion and belief. This right should always be ensured and all the religions are equal before the law. Followers of all religions are important part of the national solidarity and contribute to the promotion of the religious values to the development of the society.

Especially, since the National Assembly Standing Committee's adoption of the Ordinance on Freedom of Religion and Belief, the right to freedom of religion and belief has

been better ensured. Religions in Viet Nam, including Hoa Hao Buddhism have been strongly supported and the Viet Nam Fatherland Front has paid due attention to assisting religion activities and Churches' social activities, supporting the life of followers, developing their communities, and helping them to contribute to the development of the nation...

The results of the protection and promotion of the freedom of religion and belief have been vividly manifested by the thriving development of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church in the last three terms. Notably:

1- Building a solidified Church operating under the Church's Charter and State Law

Since the establishment of the Church, this religion has been developed in terms of personnel. The personnel of the Board at all levels have grown along with their solidarity. Mutual support in all activities and social works of the Church has been strongly promoted. The Boards operate under the principle of majority. All the decisions are made according to the will of the majority and then disseminated by the messages sent to all the Boards in the system. At the moment, the Church has Huong Sen Magazine and its own website, acting as the public spokesperson of the Church and all the followers. The Church has always strived for a smooth operation with good relations with all relevant authorities, organizations, other religions and all the segments of the society.

2- The organizational structure of the Church with bigger ownership for the followers:

Thanks to the policy of the State to promote religions, the personnel of the Hoa Hoa Buddhist Church has been expanded through the last 3 terms.

Indicators	1999 (First term)	2013 (Third term)
- Total personnel	670	3.211
- National Board	11 members	26 members
- Local branches in provinces	10 provinces and cities with 34 personnel	14 provinces and cities with 120 personnel
- Number of local Boards	257 local Boards with 625 personnel	379 local Boards with 2.544 personnel
- Number of instructors	none	201 instructors

There are also big festival of the Church, one on the 18 of May of the Lunar New Year to commemorate the establishment of the Church and one on the 25 of November of the Lunar New Year to commemorate the birthday of Master Huynh. At these ceremonies, thousands of followers of Hoa Hao from all provinces and cities throughout the country flock to worshipping places of the Church to attend. There are 41 Hoa Hao churches that have been recognized. An Hoa Pagoda – or Thay Pagoda – was the place where Master Huynh first put his incense bowl to “plead to the earth and heaven” to establish religion in the Year of the Cat 1939 and now becomes the center for worshipping, not only for followers but also guests who can enjoy free meals offered by the Church.

3- The expansion of Hoa Hao teaching

Every year, the Church has organized many classes to spread the teaching and provide the basic training for followers using all the available media, including Huong Sen Magazine, the website, books and CDs...The production of the Church's items to serve worshipping activities has been carried out. More than 200 instructors have been trained and sent to different places to disseminate the knowledge under the forms suitable for different types of followers, trying to provide them with correct and sound advice suiting their needs.

The number of training courses and classes, as well as the printed materials have expanded every year. In 2012, the number of training courses at pagodas were 420 with 521 classes and 33,600 followers. The community-based teachings were 731 with 856 classes and 146,200 followers.

4- The protection of the original Hoa Hao teaching

The National Board and the Steering Board of the Church have paid due attention to the measures to protect the original teaching of the Church. The Steering Board has been able to provide good solutions to the deviation of the original teaching, including the incorrect understanding and interpretation of the teachings, or the contamination of the teachings through inappropriate behavior and languages.

5- Philanthropy work and community-based activities

Following the teaching by Master Huynh and the guidance of the religion, which is "Religion for the Nation", followers of Hoa Hao Buddhism has been living in solidarity, mutual support and a strong philanthropy spirit...

The most common type of activities include free meals (rice, congee), water... in hospitals, healthcare centers, orphanages, elderly homes, and construction of rural roads, bridges... have had strong, growing impacts in the Central provinces of Viet Nam. Philanthropic activities to assist families met with unexpected difficulties such as natural calamities, shortages during big national, religious celebrations ... are being extended to distant, far-flung regions, ethnic minority, mountainous regions... helping the local populace to gain confidence and fortitude in life.

Free hospital transfer buses and eye surgeries for poor patients have also been given attention and become common place in many localities. The gathering and prescription of free, traditional medication in many localities have proven effective in community healthcare protection, particularly for families in difficult circumstances. The construction of cemeteries, monetary donations to families in need have helped to strengthen the bond among local people as well as the mutual assistance spirit in the community without discrimination to class, religious beliefs, ethnicities... The

construction of gratitude, charity homes, bridges, roads, upgrading of transport routes... have showcased the hearts of Hoa Hao Buddhist followers in participation in national target programs in development of new rural areas. Caring for the young generation have also been evidenced by the granting of scholarships for poor, studious students, awarding of stationeries for students every start of a new school year,... A number of establishments have also organized free kitchens to feed students, so as to help them to have peace of mind when studying, free up pressure on their families. These efforts have met with high consensus from the communities. The followers have also provided assistance to local activities in terms of protection of the handicapped, victims of Agent Orange, orphans, poor patients... These are the foundations to develop spirits of harmony in the community to contribute to national development processes.

For the whole first term (1999 - 2004), various activities had been valued at 22 billion VND, but for just one year (since July/2012), the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church has spent nearly 200 billion VND (nearly 10 million USD), an over 9 fold increase compared to the first term.

Every year, particular during major celebration days, many local Hoa Hao Buddhism boards, notable faithfuls have received recognition, awards under various forms for the many exceptional contributions to Hoa Hao Buddhism as well as to society.

III- PROSPECTS

The achievements over the past 14 years as mentioned above is an affirmation of the righteousness of “Religion for the Nation”. These are also vivid, meaningful examples of assurance, and promotion of freedom of religion in Viet Nam.

In the current process of international integration, and in the era of information, to satisfy demands for personal, spiritual development and to meet the wishes of followers, the Central Management Board of Hoa Hao Buddhism is actively seeking measures, on the basis of firm, gradual steps, to overcome difficulties, improve management capacities, training, expertise for its personnel investing in modern equipment for ease of operations.

These achievements of the 4 programs will be the solid foundation, to open up new positive prospects for the 4th General Meeting of Faithfuls, expected to be held in the end of the 2nd quarter of 2014, to continue to integrate suitable measures, initiatives to further develop the achievements, improve the leadership of the

management board, supplement articles to the Charter items which are in line with the principles, catechisms, appropriate to the wishes of devotees, the national socioeconomic situation as well as the laws of the State.

The Central Management Board of Hoa Hao Buddhism has been recognized by the State as the sole legal representative of Hoa Hao Buddhism to strive, together with its followers, to realize the teaching of Master Huynh of “learning the teaching, forging the personality” and to carry out its citizenry duties to the country.

IV- PROPOSALS - RECOMMENDATIONS

We hope the State, and Viet Nam Fatherland Front will pay closer attention and give more assistance to Hoa Hao Buddhism in participation in the national construction, community development process, taking part in socialization of healthcare, education and humanitarian... activities

We hope the State, and Viet Nam Fatherland Front at all levels will pay attention to and assist Hoa Hao Buddhism in religious activities overseas; as well as help to prevent division, incitement of violence and hatred within itself aimed at destroying the Great Unity of people and religion in Viet Nam, which goes against the true dogmas of Master Huynh.

We hope that the State policies, regulations concerning religion and religious beliefs will continue to be improved to better facilitate the operation of religious activities and to better realize the role of religions in general, and Hoa Hao Buddhism in particular in the national construction and protection efforts of the beloved Motherland.

To:

- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

**On behalf of the National Board
Authorized by Head of the Board
Deputy Head**



Bui Văn Đương
Bùi Văn Đương