

H. Res. 427

In the House of Representatives, U.S.,

November 19, 2003.

Whereas Buddhism has a 2,000-year tradition in Vietnam and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) is an heir to this tradition;

Whereas the Government of Vietnam in 1981 declared the UBCV, one of the largest religious denominations in the country, illegal, confiscated its temples, and persecuted its clergy for refusing to join the state-sponsored Buddhist organizations;

Whereas the Government of Vietnam has often imprisoned UBCV clergy and subjected them to other forms of persecution; the Patriarch of the UBCV, the 85-year-old Most Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, has been detained and restrained for more than 2 decades in isolated areas of Vietnam;

Whereas the Vietnamese Government has held the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do, the Executive President of the UBCV and his deputy, the Venerable Thich Tue Sy, in various forms of detention since 1977;

Whereas the Very Venerable Thich Thien Minh, Supreme Counselor of the UBCV, was tortured to death in a re-education camp in 1978;

Whereas many other leading UBCV figures, including Thich Thien Hanh, Thich Phuoc An, Thich Dong Tho, Thich Vien Dinh, Thich Thai Hoa, Thich Nguyen Ly, Thich Thanh Huyen, Thich Khong Tanh, Thich Phuoc Vien, Thich Hai Tang, Thich Dong Tho, Thich Nguyen Vuong, Thich Chi Mau, Thich Chi Thang, and Thich Thanh Quang have been detained, harassed, and under tight surveillance;

Whereas several members of the UBCV have fled to Cambodia to escape religious repression and harassment;

Whereas Pham Van Tuong, formerly known as Thich Tri Luc, disappeared from Cambodia in July 2002 after being given refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and has since been discovered to be in custody in Vietnam, where he is reportedly charged with the vague crime of “fleeing abroad or defecting overseas with the intent to oppose the people’s administration,” which carries a possible sentence of life imprisonment;

Whereas Vietnam has acceded to international covenants and treaties that prohibit the forced repatriation of UNHCR-recognized refugees;

Whereas Vietnam has acceded to international covenants and treaties that protect the right to faith, belief, and practice;

Whereas Vietnam’s constitution protects the right of religious belief;

Whereas in a show of religious tolerance, the Vietnamese Government in April 2003 allowed the Most Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, the Fourth Supreme Patriarch of the UBCV, to receive urgent medical care in Hanoi;

Whereas at that time, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai met with Venerable Thich Huyen Quang and assured him that his and Venerable Thich Quang Do's detention were mistakes by local officials and that he hoped they would extend Buddhist forgiveness toward past actions of the government;

Whereas in June 2003, the Vietnamese Government ended the detention order against Venerable Thich Quang Do, the Executive President of the UBCV;

Whereas in September and October 2003, the UBCV held a meeting in Nguyen Thieu Pagoda in Binh Dinh province to discuss church affairs, choose a new leadership which had been vacant for a decade, and verify Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's promise of a new era of understanding and respect;

Whereas Vietnamese authorities attempted to disrupt these gatherings by restricting the travel of monks from other provinces and then intimidating those attending;

Whereas on October 8, 2003, Vietnamese authorities initiated a tense standoff following the meeting, where police stopped a vehicle carrying the UBCV's new leadership and subsequently detained the eleven passengers;

Whereas Venerables Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do were taken to their respective pagodas where they have been effectively isolated and detained; four senior monks, the Venerable Thich Tue Sy, Thich Thanh Huyen, Thich Nguyen Ly, and the UBCV Supreme Patriarch's personal assistant, Venerable Thich Dong Tho, were immediately sentenced to 24 months of administrative detainment by written orders of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, and three others, the

Venerables Thich Thien Hanh, Thich Thai Hoa, and Thich Nguyen Vuong to 24 months administrative detainment by “oral” orders from various local authorities, in protest of which the Venerable Thich Thien Hanh initiated a hunger strike on October 19, 2003;

Whereas according to reports by the United States State Department, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and the European Union, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam systematically limits the right of religious organizations to choose their own clergy;

Whereas according to these same reports, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam uses house arrest and long prison sentences to punish individuals for practicing their faith, as evidenced also by the jail sentences handed down to Father Nguyen Van Ly, his three relatives, Montagnard and Hmong Protestants, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao Buddhists;

Whereas during the 107th Congress the House of Representatives passed H.R. 2833, the Vietnam Human Rights Act, on September 6, 2001, which noted the persecutions faced by various members of the UBCV over the past 25 years; and

Whereas because of systematic, egregious, and ongoing abuses of religious freedom, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended that the President of the United States designate Vietnam as a “country of particular concern” under the provisions of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) congratulates the new leadership of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam;

(2) urges the Government of Vietnam to respect the right of all independent religious organizations to meet, worship, operate, and practice their faith in accordance with Vietnam's own constitution and international covenants to which Vietnam is a signatory;

(3) urges the Government of Vietnam to restore freedom to all Vietnamese citizens imprisoned or under house arrest for practicing their faith or for advocating freedom of religion, especially the Most Venerable Thich Huyen Quang and the Very Venerable Thich Quang Do;

(4) is committed to promoting religious freedom in Vietnam, and, in furtherance of this goal, urges the implementation of the recommendations of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; and

(5) urges the United States Embassy in Vietnam to closely monitor cases of abuse of religious belief and practice, routinely visit detained clergy members, especially those in need of medical care, and report to the Congress on specific measures taken to protect and promote religious freedom in Vietnam.

Attest:

Clerk.