

U.S. Religious Freedom Delegation Completes Visit to Vietnam

Hanoi—The Institute for Global Engagement (IGE) has just completed its visit to better understand religious freedom in Vietnam. Hosted by the Vietnam-USA Society (VUS), the IGE delegation visited four provinces in the Northwest and Central Highlands of Vietnam. “Each member of our delegation has been very encouraged by what we have seen,” said IGE president Chris Seiple. “While progress is uneven from province to province, we look forward to working with our Vietnamese friends to sustain and expand the progress made in religious freedom throughout Vietnam.”

IGE’s visit to Vietnam takes place as the second of three confidence-building steps—agreed to by IGE and VUS in July 2005—designed to strengthen U.S.-Vietnam relations regarding religion and the rule of law. (The first step took place this past March when a VUS delegation of pastors and government officials visited Washington, D.C.).

The second step was IGE’s visit this past week. The delegation included the following members: Phuc Dang, Pastor (Vietnamese First Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Texas); Jared Daugherty, Program Officer (IGE); Cole Durham, Director of the [International Center for Law and Religion Studies](#) (Brigham Young University); James Lewis, Professor of Religious Studies ([Bethel University](#), Minnesota); Bob Roberts, Pastor ([Northwood Church](#), Dallas, Texas); and Chris Seiple.

The visit to Vietnam’s highlands produced three key observations. First, there is a profound need for seminary-trained pastors throughout Vietnam. With more pastors, the Christian community will be better equipped to contribute to social stability. Not only will communities with properly trained pastors be able to better resist social problems such as corruption, but theologically-trained pastors will also help prevent their congregations from being manipulated by cults and separatist movements. “Seminary is security,” said Seiple.

Second, while great progress has already been made in educating and training government and church officials about last year’s guidelines on religious affairs, more education and training is needed in order to prevent misunderstanding at the local level. Third, by encouraging more direct relationships between American and Vietnamese communities, stereotypes are overcome while mutual understanding is enhanced.

The third step of the IGE-VUS agreement takes place in Hanoi on 8-9 September 2006, when IGE, VUS, and the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences co-host the first-ever conference on religion and rule of law in Southeast Asia. This conference will conclude with a Memorandum of Understanding between IGE and VUS that builds on the momentum created by these three steps.

About the Institute

The [Institute for Global Engagement](#) (IGE) promotes sustainable environments for religious freedom worldwide. As a faith-based organization, IGE believes firmly in universal human dignity and is committed to the protection of all faiths through the rule of law. IGE encourages governments to respect their citizens’ right to religious freedom and educates people of faith to exercise that right responsibly. Operating at the nexus of faith, culture, security, development, and the rule of law, IGE’s relational diplomacy—currently focused on East and Central Asia—enables respectful dialogue and practical agreements that help transition countries toward sustainable religious freedom. To contact IGE, please call 703.527.3100 or visit our website at www.globalengage.org.
