

VIETNAM: FACT SHEET

RELIGION AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Demographics: There is a rich tapestry of religion in Vietnam. Approximately one-half of Vietnam's 84 million people are Buddhist. Another 6-8 million are Catholic. Protestants number 1.6 million. Muslims, Baha'i, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhists, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses are also present. The majority of religious adherents practice their religion freely without government interference.

Catholics: Catholics worship with limited government interference throughout the country, with numerous churches and regular services. The Government of Vietnam (GVN) has recently agreed to increase Seminary classes. Fifty-seven priests were publicly ordained in Hanoi in November 2005. Return of Catholic properties seized in 1975 remains an obstacle to diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The GVN retains right of refusal over Vatican appointments of Catholic bishops, but has not exercised this right in over 10 years. Catholics are eager to expand their assistance to HIV/AIDS patients and engage in other social outreach activities. The GVN has signaled its interest in permitting the Church to do so.

Protestants: The most rapidly growing religious denomination in Vietnam, particularly among ethnic minorities. Vietnam's 2004 designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) was based largely on incidents involving harassment of Protestants, notably closing of house churches and forced renunciations. Since CPC designation, over 400 house churches have registered in the Central Highlands; other unregistered churches have been allowed to operate under the new legal framework on religion. We have had no reports of forced renunciation in the Central Highlands over the past year.

Baptists: A Baptist World Alliance visited Vietnam May 16-21 to hold high-level meetings with the GVN. Overall, Baptist groups have seen marked improvements in their ability to worship freely since the implementation of the new legal framework on religion in 2005. The GVN has suggested that it will register additional Baptist congregations by the end of the summer.

Mormons: Several hundred Mormons are present in Vietnam. They are in the process of registering under the new legal framework for religion. The

Commission on Religious Affairs has promised a positive reply to their application.

Jehovah's Witnesses: There are ten active but unregistered congregations in Vietnam. They have been asked to submit documents for registration. There have been no reported incidents involving Jehovah's Witnesses.

Grace Baptist Church, Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites: Factions of each of these churches were registered in Ho Chi Minh City in 2006, with national registration pending since September 2005. A splinter group of Mennonites in HCMC, however, continues to clash with the GVN and is not recognized because of its political activities.

Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha: Followers of the government recognized VBS worship freely throughout the country.

United Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Followers of the UBCV generally worship freely and join with Buddhist Sangha congregations. Eleven members of the UBCV leadership, however, remain under pagoda arrest and their ability to teach or lead worship is limited. The GVN has not registered this faction of Buddhists because of the fiercely anti-government views of its leadership.

Hoa Hao Buddhists: This Buddhist sect has 1.6 million members. The government has recognized one faction of the Hoa Hao and allow it to operate with minimal interference. A small faction, however, remains at odds with the GVN for their political activities. Elements of the Hoa Hao were the last to surrender to the communist forces in 1975. Citing GVN harassment, a Hoa Hao monk attempted to self-immolate in front the U.S. Consulate in protest last year.

Muslims, Baha'i, Cao Dai: These groups practice their faiths freely with no reported complaints of harassment by the GVN.

Registration/Recognition: Under the new legal framework, registration refers to two processes: 1) registration of the organization or congregation in order to worship, and 2) registration of religious activities themselves. Recognition means that the GVN acknowledges the existence and legitimacy of a religious organization. All religious organizations must be registered before they can be recognized. Recognition grants an organization additional legal rights, such as the right to open a seminary. In addition to

registration and recognition, the GVN has been facilitating the operation of houses of worship that are either not yet eligible for registration, or whose applications are pending. Facilitation means that authorities allow religious practice to continue even though official approval of the registration of activities or organizations have not been given.

Trafficking in Persons (TIP)

On June 5, 2006, Vietnam was designated by the Department of State as “Tier 2,” the second best of four TIP rankings. It shares this designation with 78 other countries, including Japan, Portugal, Greece, and the Czech Republic. No U.S. sanctions are required for Tier 2 ranking. Focus of TIP concern in Vietnam is on Vietnamese labor export companies who charge fees to send workers overseas where they may face exploitation, and on Vietnamese companies that arrange for overseas marriages for Vietnamese women. The GVN has made a commitment at the Prime Minister’s level to combat TIP. Resources restraints have limited GVN anti-TIP actions to date. The U.S. is providing anti-TIP assistance through grants to NGOs that operate in along the Chinese border and in the Mekong Delta region.