



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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23 August 2004

### VNM42853.E

Vietnam: Update to VNM36745.E of 23 May 2001 and VNM37830.E of 28 September 2001 on the treatment of Hoa Hao members, particularly that of rank-and-file members (2002 to August 2004)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Several sources reported that the Hoa Hao sect continues to encounter difficulties with the authorities, including detention of some of its members (AI 2003; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, Sect. 2c; HWR 2003; USCIRF May 2004). Although the government officially recognized the Hoa Hao, there are leaders and followers from Hoa Hao sects formed prior to 1975 that reject the official organization (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003). The government outlaws members of unregistered Hoa Hao churches and "they sometimes experience harassment as a result" (ibid.).

#### Treatment of rank-and-file Hoa Hao members

In January 2002, Bui Van Hue, a Hoa Hao member, was sentenced to three years in jail by a provincial court in An Giang for allegedly violating his detention order and for leaving the country without authorization (HRW 2003). On 28 March 2002, two other members, Truong Van Thuc and Nguyen Chau Lang, were among a total of eight supporters who were detained for organizing a commemorative event for a Hoa Hao leader; while the six others were released after the arrest, Thuc and Lang were sentenced to three years in jail (*International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003). Thuc was released in September 2002, but Lang was still imprisoned as of the end of the report period for the *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* (ibid.). In April 2002, Le Minh Triet, a Hoa Hao monk, was handed down an additional two-year administrative detention order after serving eight years in jail (HRW 2003). In November 2002, Hoa Hao followers were allegedly "beaten and briefly detained" after police ordered them to remove a gate from one of their temples (ibid.).

In January 2003, a Vietnamese Hoa Hao monk, Nui Ta-Len, established a religious practice in Kampot province, Cambodia, after he and other believers "escaped the crackdown by the Vietnamese authorities in An Giang (Moat Chruk) province last year...which led some monks to burn themselves" (*Phnom Penh Samleng Yuveakchon Khmer* 25 Jan. 2003). The incident resulted in the arrest of sect leader, Nguyen Van Liem, and in the fleeing of other sect followers to Cambodia (ibid.). The *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* states that, as of June 2003, many Hoa Hao "lay persons" were detained, including Bui Van Hue, Nguyen Chau Lang, Ha Hai, Ho Van Trong, and Truong Van Duc (18 Dec. 2003). On 1 July 2003, Nguyen Van Lia was sentenced to three-years imprisonment for organizing a ceremony commemorating Huynh Phu So, a Hao Hoa prophet (USCIRF 1 Oct. 2003).

In its May 2004 annual report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported that roughly 18 members of the Hoa Hao sect were subjected to some form of detention in Vietnam.

#### Treatment of Hoa Hao leadership

Several 2003 sources reported the detention of Hoa Hao leader, Le Quang Liem, (AFP 19 Aug. 2002; HRW 2003; *International Religious Freedom Report 2003* 18 Dec. 2003), as well as Nguyen Van Dien, another leader of the sect (ibid.; *Phnom Penh Samleg Yuveakchon Khmer* 25 Jan. 2003). According to the Vietnamese government, Le Quang Liem was detained, not for his religious activities, but for his "criminal offences" (BBC 8 Nov. 2002). Based on a Radio Free Asia report, AFP stated on 19 March 2003 that Liem was ordered by the authorities to serve an additional two-year period under house arrest.

### Government policy on religion

AP reported on 13 July 2004 that the Vietnamese government re-articulated its stance on illegal religious activity in a national decree. The decree states that:

Citizens are banned from using religious freedom to undermine national independence and unification, incite violence or cause division among people. It also says religious activities that threaten national security, social order or unity will be prohibited (AP 13 July 2004).

The decree was signed into law by the Vietnamese National Assembly on 18 June 2004 and will become effective on 15 November 2004 (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including** : Forum 18, Freedom House, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Institute on Religion and Democracy, International Coalition for Religious Freedom, Overseas Hoa Hao Buddhist Association, Vietnam Human Rights Network.

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