LETTER TO SECRETARY TILLERSON REQUESTING
VIETNAM CPC DESIGNATION

As of August 3, 2017
Letter is still open for signatures

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As the time for CPC designations approaches, we write to urge you to designate Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern. The CPC designation has been recommended for Vietnam by the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) since 2002 for its continued violation of religious freedom. USCIRF's 2017 report noted that the Vietnamese government continues to harass and target individuals who belong to the following faith and ethnic groups: Cao Dai; Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam; Hoa Hao; Khmer Krom; Montagnards; Hmong; Falun Gong; and Duong Van Minh.

Montagnard Christians in Vietnam's Central Highlands face some of the most brutal persecution by the government. The government puts a number of restrictions on the group, including preventing them from holding religious ceremonies. Members are often summoned to speak with authorities and urged to leave their faith. USCIRF continues to receive reports of forced renunciations of faith by officials.

Last year, Amnesty International recorded at least 84 prisoners of conscience detained in Vietnam. One of the most notable is Nguyen Cong Chinh from the Quang Nam province of the Central Highlands. In 2011, he was falsely charged with undermining national security due to his work as a pro-democracy activist and his public opposition to the government's ban on preaching in the Central Highlands.

While in prison, he was reportedly physically tortured, verbally abused, and denied medical treatment. Authorities also harassed Chinh’s wife, Mrs. Tran Thi Hong. Unfortunately, this maltreatment is commonplace for Vietnam’s prisoners of conscience and their families. After more than 6 years in prison, he was released on July 28, 2017, after immense international pressure. We recognize the need to continue to assist the dozens of other prisoners of conscience who remain unjustly detained.

Vietnam first received the CPC designation from the United States in 2004. As intended, the CPC status urged Vietnam to improve its religious freedom and as a result, conditions did in fact improve. A year later, in May 2005, the United States and Vietnam entered into an agreement.
regarding religious liberty, and shortly after, 12 religious prisoners were released as part of a special amnesty. In 2006, the U.S. State Department removed the CPC designation.

However, with the pressure from the United States removed, religious freedom in Vietnam again declined, and to this day continues to decline. The communist Vietnamese government has no interest in improving its religious freedom record unless the United States makes it a criterion in US-Vietnamese relations.

As seen in the past, the CPC designation is a highly effective tool of leverage to influence Vietnam’s human rights standards. We urge you to designate Vietnam as a CPC and make human rights in Vietnam a priority, as the neglect to do so by the previous administration has allowed for much unnecessary human suffering.

The United States was founded on the belief that no government should be able to tell its people how to worship, and certainly should not be able to discriminate or persecute its citizens due to their religion. As such, the United States has a responsibility to uphold the fundamental right of religious freedom, and not reward countries that participate in religious persecution.

We thank you for your consideration of this very important matter.

Sincerely,

ORGANIZATIONS

JUBILEE CAMPAIGN USA
21st CENTURY WILBERFORCE INITIATIVE
ASSOCIATION OF CON DAU PARISHIONERS
BOAT PEOPLE SOS
CENTER FOR PLURALISM
CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE UK
CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY NATIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICE
COALITION FOR A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC VIETNAM
COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN VIETNAM
DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT FOR VIETNAM
HOA HAO BUDDHIST CONGREGATION - OVERSEAS CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN
INTERNATIONAL OFFICE OF CHAMPA
MONTAGNARD ASSISTANCE PROJECT
MONTAGNARD HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION
PATMOS INSTITUTE
POPULAR COUNCIL OF CAO DAI RELIGION
UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM
VIETNAM COALITION AGAINST TORTURE
VIETNAM ENLIGHTENMENT DEMOCRATIC FORUM
VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
VIETNAMESE WOMEN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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