



State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Vietnam

Publisher [Minority Rights Group International](#)

Publication Date 3 July 2014

Cite as Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Vietnam*, 3 July 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53ba8dc75.html> [accessed 1 August 2014]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

The Communist Party of Vietnam, led by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, stepped up its assault on political dissidents, pro-democracy and minority activists in 2013. Fresh restrictions were applied to journalists and bloggers, including crippling fines for social media users posting material considered 'propaganda against the state', while the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities continued.

Dozens of activists were sentenced to lengthy prison terms, many targeted for their religious affiliation. In January, 14 bloggers were jailed for three to 13 years on allegations of subversion. A number of the defendants were affiliated with two Catholic churches known for their vocal support of democracy and human rights. In October, prominent minority rights lawyer and writer Le Quoc Quan was sentenced to two and half years in prison and a US\$59,000 fine for what HRW described as 'trumped up' charges of tax evasion.

This comes amid a series of government efforts aimed at restricting religious freedoms in Vietnam. The start of the year marked the introduction of a new decree restricting the practice of non-state-sanctioned religions. This could strengthen the government's repression of unrecognized or targeted religious groups, including Catholic congregations based in Vietnam's major cities, Christian congregations in ethnic minority (including Degar or Montagnard) areas in central and northern Vietnam, the Unified Buddhist Church and certain Theravada Buddhist sects among the minority Khmer Krom in the Mekong Delta.

Critics say the law is aimed at curtailing the social activism of these groups, often relating to land rights in minority regions. The Montagnards, a cluster of over 30 indigenous communities living in Vietnam's central highlands, accuse the government of selling their resource-rich lands to large agricultural companies and ethnic majority Kinh settlers from the lowland regions. In May, eight Montagnards were sentenced to between three and 11 years in prison for 'undermining national unity' by staging protests against an unpopular hydropower plant. Their charges included associating with a 'false' Catholic sect and working with a Degar organization, viewed as a separatist terrorist group by the government.

It is not uncommon for religious minorities to be assaulted or detained by the authorities for holding prayer vigils or other protests against alleged land encroachments or religious rights abuses. Christian organizations reported that over 50 Christians, including pastors and community

leaders, were arrested in 2013, with one Hmong church elder reportedly dying in police custody. Buddhist monks from unrecognized sects were also brutally targeted by authorities in 2013. In June, two ethnic Khmer monks were forced to go into hiding after the authorities declared they had spread 'false information' about the government's treatment of the minority. A third monk was reportedly detained, stripped of his robes and thrown unconscious into the street, according to the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation.

In 2013, Vietnam pushed ahead with amendments to its Constitution, following a surprisingly participatory public process. But campaigners were left disappointed when the new text, passed in November, only tightened the ruling party's grip on power – ignoring pleas for free and fair elections. Although a number of new clauses were ostensibly intended to boost free expression and curb arbitrary arrests, the document makes exceptions for reasons of 'national security or order' – leaving significant loopholes that could be exploited to repress ethnic and religious minorities.

Land grabs, which also affect villagers from the Kinh majority, are a major issue in Vietnam, where the government is currently considering a series of reforms to its 2003 Land Law. But the party's constitutional reform committee quickly rebuffed requests to sanction the private ownership of land in the communist state. Instead, the government reaffirmed the arbitrary seizure of land for purposes of 'socio-economic development', which is likely to have a devastating impact on minorities living in resource-rich areas. Vietnam does not recognize that indigenous communities have customary ties to their lands and natural resources, even though this is enshrined in international law and considered an essential part of protecting their human rights.

The government remains verbally committed to improving the rights and lives of ethnic minorities, which comprise roughly 14 per cent of the population. During the year, the Communist Party pledged to support minority rights in collaboration with the European Union and other international agencies. Economic development is seen as a key priority for the government, but concerns remain over the inclusivity and sensitivity of the process. Minorities are often denigrated or misrepresented in the state-controlled media. Analysts say this has helped develop a harmful narrative of Vietnam's minorities, rooted in cultural stereotypes and sensationalism.

Local campaigners are working to challenge these stereotypes by offering media training to journalists and distributing information about international norms on the protection of minorities and indigenous peoples. However, the biggest challenge is tackling bias and discriminatory language perpetuated by the government, which controls the country's media. Vietnam does not have any laws explicitly prohibiting hate speech, but forbids the dissemination of material deemed a threat to the state.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country

All countries

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Viet Nam](#)

Topics

- [Freedom of religion](#)
- [Housing, land and property rights \(HLP\)](#)
- [Indigenous persons](#)
- [Minorities](#)
- [Racial / Ethnic persecution](#)
- [Religious persecution \(including forced conversion\)](#)