

**Hearing Testimony by Sub-dignitary Bach Phung Nguyen of Caodai  
Religion before Tom Lantos Human Rights Committee on March 26, 2014**

**Statement of Sub-dignitary Nguyen Bach Phung  
Clergy Member of Independent Cao Dai Sect**

**Before the**

**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Hearing on the Persecution of Religious and Indigenous Communities in Vietnam**

**Wednesday, March 26, 2014**

**2:00 PM - 4:00 PM**

**HVC 210**

Honorable members of Tom Lantos Human Rights Committee,

I am Nguyen Bach Phung, Caodai Sub-dignitary and Acting Female Head of Chau Thanh Religious District, Vinh Long Religious Province. I am also the Secretary of the Representative Committee of Popular Bloc of the Caodai Tayninh Holy See, as well as a member of the Vietnamese Inter-Faith Council.

I would like to apologize to members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Committee for being unable to come to the hearing because my movement has been severely restricted by the Vietnamese government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My family follows Caodai religion and I have been a Caodaist since I was 23 years old. Prior to April 1975, we practiced our faith without government interference. However, under the Communist government, we are no longer free to practice our faith, which is the same situation for the clergy members and followers of other religions.

In 1979 the Vietnamese Communist Party disbanded the Sacerdotal Council of the Caodai Tayninh Holy See and Caodai Religious Administrations from the central to local levels, and established the Governance Council (Hoi Dong Chuong Quan) under the government's control. Spiritism, which is the foundation of our religion, is prohibited. They abolished our canonical laws, modified our traditional rituals, forbade our assembly for meetings and the installation of God's altar, and did not allow us to preach religious teachings, print religious books, or make photocopies of religious materials, and so on.

The Vietnamese Communist government isolates us by labeling us as bad elements so that people stay away from us, their agents go almost house to house to harass and threaten followers and force us to submit ourselves to the Governance Council. We do not recognize the government sanctioned Caodai Governance Council. Therefore, the Government uses police and thugs to oppress and beat us. They also confiscate our temples and our religion's properties.

For example, on Sept. 12, 2013, Mrs Ta Thi Thu Nga invited independent Caodai followers and clergy members for a ceremony to establish God's altar at her home at Bau Nang village, Duong Minh Chau district, Tay Ninh province; but she did not seek permission from the pro-government Caodai Governance Council. Several Caodai practitioners and I were assaulted and suppressed by police, thugs and members of the Caodai Governance Council. They took away two camcorders, two iphones and 17,950,000 VND from our members. They kept us by force in Mrs. Nga's home from 1pm on Sept. 12, 2013 until 4am the following day.

On November 3rd, 2013, local police and government officials threatened myself and several Caodai practitioners and prevented us from holding the memorial service for Student Priest Thai Kim Thanh at the home of Sub-dignitary Nguyen Kim Lan in Vinh Long City, Vinh Long province. The police accused us of violating the law. Then, they summoned three young Caodai followers to the local police station for questioning and intimidating them.

The above actions are consistent with the policies of the Communist Party and of the Vietnamese government aiming at eradication of the Caodai religion, as well as other independent religions such as the Unified Buddhist Church, Catholic Church, Protestant house churches, and Hoa Hao Buddhist Church.

Since the end of April 1975, the Vietnamese government has issued eleven confidential and top secret documents describing its policy to destroy Caodaism. Specifically, they have used the pro-government Governance Council to restrain our activities and take over our temples. On March 23, 2000 the local government including the police of Vinh Long province assisted the local pro-government Governance Council to take over our Vinh Long temple.

This policy continues to this day.

On September 16, 2012 the government helped the Governance Council to take over the Caodai Phu My Temple in Binh Dinh province by force. They assaulted independent Caodai members; a member of the government-sanctioned Caodai group poured petroleum over the body of a Caodai follower present in the temple with the intent to burn him, but was dissuaded by some in his own group. Sub-dignitary Nguyễn Nhơn was beaten and suffered a broken nose; he had to be hospitalized afterward. Some other independent Caodai followers were also injured.

On July 3, 2013, the government and police of Tien Giang Province supported the members of the local office of the Governance Council to take over the Long Binh Temple. They used a truck to knock down the front gate of the temple, then plain-clothes police and thugs assaulted independent Caodai followers. Follower Nguyen Van Em and female Sub-dignitary Le Thi Ket were severely injured, and many others were injured to a lesser degree.

On July 25, 2013 Sub-dignitary Nguyen Kim Lan and myself, both members of the Vietnamese Inter-faith Council, were restrained by the police of Vinh Long province. They stopped the bus carrying us, and forced the driver to throw us out of the bus. Then they stationed at two ends of the road leading into our house to prevent us from going out of the province for five days. The Vietnamese Communist government also restrained the movement of clergy members of the Vietnamese Inter-faith Council, such as Rev. Thich Khong Tanh, Rev. Le Quang Liem, Pastor Nguyen Hoang Hoa, Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton, Sub-dignitary Hua Phi, and others.

On January 5, 2014 while some independent Caodaists and myself held a memorial service for Mrs. Ngo Thi Thanh Dao, 42 years old (at the time of her death) in the City of Vinh Long, Vinh Long Province, police and government officials ordered us to stop the ceremony because we did not seeking the permission of the Governance Council.

Those are but a few examples.

Before April 1975, the Caodai religion had over 300 temples, including temples revering our Mother God. Today most of these temples have been taken over by the pro-government Governance Council. Only 18 temples and 6 Mother God temples are left with independent Caodai practitioners; and the government intends to take over all of them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We want our rights to freedoms of religion and belief, as well as other human rights, which are enjoyed by ordinary citizens of all democratic nations in the world.

We would like to request the Vietnamese Communist government to:

- Respect the independence of the Caodai's religious administration, respect the legality of our church, and return to us properties that belonged to the Caodai Church before 1975; under the supervision of the United Nations.
- Unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience, who advocate for democracy, human rights and religious freedom;
- Comply with the Declaration of UN Human Rights and the commitments it made to the United Nations Human Right Council, especially now Vietnam is a member of that UN council..

We would like to request the U.S. government and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Committee to:

- Set the pre-requisite human rights conditions for Vietnam to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).
- Use your influence to pressure the Vietnamese government to legally recognize the independent, traditional religions in Vietnam and stop interfering in our church's affairs.

The Vietnamese Communist government has deceived the Vietnamese people as well as the international community for 39 years. They have rarely kept their promises.

With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit a number of reports that we have prepared for the United Nations Human Rights Council for inclusion into this hearing's record.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

May God bless you and the United States of America!

I would like to sincerely thank you.