

**RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS POLICY  
IN VIETNAM**



**SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM  
GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

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IN VIETNAM**

**Hanoi – 2022**

# **GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

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## **PREFACE**

With a long-standing cultural tradition, Vietnam is inhabited by 54 ethnic groups with various religions. Today, in Vietnam, there are over 26.5 million religious followers (accounting for 27 percent of the total population); there is no discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief, no conflicts and disputes among religions; followers of different beliefs or religions co-live in harmony in the Vietnamese community.

In order to guarantee people's right to freedom of religion and belief, from the first Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1946) to the current Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the State has always affirmed that freedom of religion and belief is one of the fundamental human rights. The latest Constitution, which was approved by the National Assembly on 28 November 2013 and officially came into effect on 1 January 2014, contains new stipulations on human rights. It represents new advances in Vietnam's judicial thinking and the institutionalization of human

rights in Vietnam and follows the standards set forth in international human rights conventions.

In accordance with the implementation of institutional principles, the State constantly improves the legal system on belief and religion to satisfy the religious needs of the people, to promote the national great unity strength, to build an increasingly developed, democratic, equitable and advanced Vietnam. In order to concretize the 2013 Constitution and in correspondence with the real belief and religious activities in Vietnam, at its second session's sitting on 18 November 2016, the 14th National Assembly passed the Law on Belief and Religion. On 30 December 2017, the Government issued Decree No. 162/2017/ND-CP detailing a number of articles of this Law and measures to put it into effect.

In recent years, Vietnam has recorded multiple important achievements in the cause of protecting and promoting human rights, including the right to freedom of belief and religion. The implementation of the religious policy of Vietnam has led to significant changes in the religious life in this country, including the religious activities of both followers and religious dignitaries and organizations. The State has granted official recognition to 36 religious organizations, presented registration certificates for religious activities to four organizations and one religious sect under 16 religions. Accordingly, other



activities such as dignitaries training, the construction and repair of places of worship, international relations of religious individuals and organizations are carried out in accordance with the law. It may be said that the recent belief and religious activities in Vietnam have advanced in a positive direction, significantly contributing to national construction and development.

While evaluating the guideline and policies towards religion, as well as the achievements in religious work, the Documents of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam outlines the tasks for religious work in the time to come as follows: “*[It is necessary] to motivate, unite and rally religious organizations, dignitaries and believers to lead a good life, both secular and religious, and to make active contributions to national construction and defense. To provide religious organizations with guarantees to operate in accordance with legal stipulations and their charters and rules recognized by the State. To draw on religions’ fine cultural and ethical values and resources for national development.*”

To help readers at home and abroad, researchers, and those interested in religious matters have a better understanding of the religious policy and religious life in Vietnam, the Vietnam Government Committee for Religious Affairs has published this book entitled ***Religions and Religious Policy in Vietnam***, with basic information

on the religions, religious policy, and achievements in guaranteeing the freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam, challenges to be overcome and priority directions, in order to promote the people's better enjoyment of the freedom of belief and religion.

*Hanoi, December 2022*

**Government Committee for Religious Affairs**

## CHAPTER I

# RELIGIONS IN VIETNAM

Vietnam is a multi-religious state, where a variety of religions can be found—from primitive religions such as Totemism, Wicca, and Shamanism to organized religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. When it comes to religion, Vietnam is likened to a miniature world. Today, many countries typically have one major religion that greatly impacts their political and social life, but in Vietnam religions co-exist and are equal to each other, without any religion playing a dominant role. The religions in Vietnam include ones with foreign origins such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam and Baha'i, and endogenous ones such as Caodaism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association, Tu An Hieu Nghia (Four Debts of Gratitude) Buddhism and Buu Son Ky Huong Faith. The diversity of religions accounts for the diversity of the types of religious organizations, including religions with only one organization (Buddhism, Catholicism), and others with a number of different organizations (Protestantism, Caodaism).

As of 31 December 2021, the State had recognized 36 religious organizations, and presented registration certificates for religious activities to four organizations and one religious sect. They all belong to 16 religions; there are thousands of collective religious groups (including groups of foreigners legally residing in Vietnam); over 26.5 million religious followers (accounting for about 27% of the country's population), more than 54,000 religious dignitaries, 135 thousand religious officials, and 29,658 places of worship.

The religions in Vietnam make certain contributions to the country in various aspects of social life, and at the same time they are the positive social and cultural factors that add to the diversity and uniqueness of Vietnamese culture. The foreign-origin religions have, in fact, been adapted to Vietnamese culture, creating a unique feature of the Vietnamese religious panorama. Vietnam is where inter-religious relations are maintained in concord with a tradition of religious solidarity and national unity in the process of nation building and defense. The peaceful and tolerant co-existence of religions along with the benevolence and humanity of Vietnamese people and society have created a vivid picture of beliefs and religions in Vietnam, which is diverse and intertwined. The harmony between religions and the State is well-evident. There is no religious conflict in this country. The bloc of great national unity, including the unity of religions, is a source

of national strength and a decisive factor to ensure success for the cause of national construction and development.

## **1. Buddhism**

Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam from the early years of the Common Era. Over the time of its integration and development, Buddhism has proven to be a peaceful religion that is commensurate with the traditional beliefs of the Vietnamese people. The spirit of Love-Compassion-Joy-Equanimity of Buddhism enables people to live altruistically, in harmony, and to value social equality and progress. The religious tenets of Buddhism are very consistent with the social morality in Vietnam. Buddhism provides a conducive environment for the development of various forms of literature, art, architecture, sculpture, etc. In terms of Buddhist architecture and sculpture, there are notable examples such as One-Pillar Pagoda, Phat Tich Pagoda, the statue of Thousand-Hands-and-Thousand-Eyes Quan In at But Thap Pagoda, and Arhat statues at Tay Phuong Pagoda. Over the course of history, Buddhism has left deep and lasting imprints from each historical period, showing its attachment to the Vietnamese nation; many Buddhist monks are credited with the merits of helping people and the country, and their names are recorded in history books.

In November 1981, following the aspiration and desire of Buddhist monks, nuns and followers

nationwide, the Vietnam's Buddhist Convention was held in Hanoi, with the participation of 168 monks, nuns and laymen representing nine organizations and sects throughout the country, including the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Unified Buddhist Association of Vietnam, Traditional Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City Buddhist Liaison Committee, Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist Sangha Congregation, the Southwestern Patriotic Clergy Solidarity Association, the Vietnam Mendicant Sangha Church, the Quan Tong Thien Thai Congregation, the South Vietnamese Buddhist Association. The Congress agreed to establish a general organization of Buddhism in Vietnam named "The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha", approved the Charter and operational motto "Dharma-Nation-Socialism". The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is the only organization representing Vietnamese Buddhist monks, nuns and devotees at home and abroad.

After the above-said event of great significance in the history of Buddhism in Vietnam, monks, nuns, and Buddhists nationwide continued to promote the patriotic tradition to "support the propagation of Buddhism, serve the Vietnamese Fatherland, and contribute to bringing peace and happiness to the world". The overwhelming majority of monks and nuns actively contribute to building the growing Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, affirming its position in the soul of the nation. The Vietnam Buddhist

Sangha holds the National Buddhist Congress every five years and has so far gone through nine congresses.

The organization of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha is currently structured as follows: (1) at the central level, there is the Patriarch Council, the Executive Council, 12 specialized departments, and a Buddhist Research Institute; (2) at the local level, there are 63 Provincial Executive Committees and over 400 District Executive Committees under the Sangha.

Concerning Buddhist education and training, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha currently has four Buddhist Institutes, 34 intermediate-level Buddhist schools, one Buddhist college, eight upper-intermediate classes, and hundreds of primary-level Buddhist classes at Buddhist temples, providing education from primary to intermediate, bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees in Buddhist studies; it also sends hundreds of Buddhist students abroad. In international cooperation, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is increasingly enhancing its position and reputation through expanding international exchanges, actively facilitating the development of Vietnamese Buddhism abroad. The Sangha successfully organized three United Nations Vesak Day Celebrations in Vietnam (2008, 2014, 2019), and is a member of various international Buddhist organizations (Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace – ABCP; World Fellowship of Buddhists – WFB; International Buddhist

Confederation – IBC; International Committee for the UN Vesak Day Celebration – ICDV, etc.).

The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha currently has four newspapers and magazines, many intramural magazines helping to disseminate the values of culture and religion to Buddhist dignitaries, followers, and common readers.

Social-charitable activities of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha contribute to reducing poverty, alleviating difficulties and burdens for the community. Currently, the Sangha has 165 Tue Tinh traditional clinics, 64 orphanages, 20 nursing homes for single seniors, over 1,000 charity classes, 33 traditional medical consulting rooms, 10 Western medical clinics, etc. In addition, it also participates in many social activities for the community such as building bridges, contributing to rural transportation infrastructure, caring for and supporting HIV/AIDS patients, helping disaster victims, and fighting epidemics.

As of December 2021, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha had 54,169 monks and nuns (including 40,095 Mahayana monks and nuns, 7,028 Khmer Theravada monks and nuns, 1,754 Kinh Theravada monks and nuns, and 5,284 mendicants), 18,544 places of worship, about 14 million devotees, and many people sympathizing with Buddhism.



## 2. Catholicism

According to the history of the Church, Catholicism was introduced into Vietnam in 1533 by a priest named “I-Nê-Khu” (Ignatius) who preached in Ninh Cuong and Quan Anh villages in Nam Chan district, and Tra Lu village in Giao Thuy district (now part of Nam Dinh province, Bui Chu diocese). However, it was only in the early 17th century that mission groups started to arrive in Vietnam. The process of Catholic propagation and development in Vietnam can be divided into four main phases: the formation phase from the beginning of the 16th century to 1884; the second phase from 1885 to 1945 (the period of French colonial rule until the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam); the third phase from 1945 to 1975 (the period of resistance against French and American colonial rule); and the fourth phase from 1975 to the present (the post-national reunification period, in which the country has been undergoing a process of construction and development).

In the course of its propagation and development in Vietnam, Catholicism has contributed to enriching the cultural heritage of the Vietnamese nation. We can cite some unique Catholic churches as examples like the Phat Diem Stone Cathedral (Kim Son, Ninh Binh), the Hanoi Grand Cathedral, the Notre Dame Cathedral in Ho Chi Minh City, or festivals that incorporate the fine features of

local culture, such as Christmas and Easter. Catholicism has also adapted itself to Vietnamese culture, creating a unique form of Vietnamese Catholicism characterized by the reverence for ancestors, or hymns in Vietnamese folk melodies.

In 1980, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam was established, including all bishops of Catholic dioceses across Vietnam. At the first Assembly (in 1980), the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam issued a Historic Statement defining the direction of Catholics' operation as "Living out the Gospel in the midst of the Nation to serve the welfare of the people". The 1980 Statement of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam expresses the feelings and responsibilities of Catholics towards their country: *To Catholics, loving the Fatherland and the people is not only a natural feeling but also a requirement of the Gospel*. The Statement also sets the task of building a new way of life and a way of expressing faith in accordance with the national cultural tradition. To date, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam has held 15 Assemblies.

The Catholic Church of Vietnam has 27 dioceses belonging to three archdioceses: the Hanoi Archdiocese comprises the dioceses of Hanoi, Hai Phong, Lang Son, Bac Ninh, Hung Hoa, Bui Chu, Phat Diem, Thai Binh, Thanh Hoa, Vinh and Ha Tinh; the Hue Archdiocese

comprises the dioceses of Hue, Da Nang, Quy Nhon, Nha Trang, Kon Tum and Buon Me Thuot; the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese comprises the dioceses of Ho Chi Minh City, Vinh Long, Can Tho, My Tho, Da Lat, Long Xuyen, Phu Cuong, Xuan Loc, Phan Thiet and Ba Ria.

The Catholic Church of Vietnam also has an organizational system based on orders. As of 2021, there were around 200 orders in Vietnam. To enhance mutual understanding and exchange of experiences among the orders, in 2003, the Vatican re-established the Vietnam Council of Major Superiors (registered for operation in 2010).

Concerning its international relations, the Vietnamese Catholic Church is a local church within the Universal Catholic Church system, with strong, closely tied relationships structured in accordance with the organizational structure of the Roman Catholic hierarchy; it has direct relationships with Catholic Churches in countries such as France, Portugal, Spain, etc. The system of international denominations in Vietnam also creates dependent and linked relationships in the international relations of the Vietnamese Catholic Church. Through its international activities, Vietnamese Catholicism expands its influence in terms of religion and geographic position, and strengthens its relationship with global and regional Catholic communities. Conversely, it also receives attention

and support from organizations and individuals abroad in religious activities.

The Vietnamese Catholic Church actively participates in charitable deeds such as health care, education, and especially early childhood education and vocational training. Currently, it is promoting activities including organizing classes for disadvantaged, homeless, illiterate and disabled children; setting up education-encouraging funds to support underprivileged students; providing scholarships to students; setting up humanitarian clinics, facilities for caring for poor children, elderly people, disabled people, and victims of Agent Orange, HIV/AIDS; building inter-village roads, bridges and water wells for poor people in remote areas.

As of December 2021, the Vietnamese Catholic Church had over 7 million followers, accounting for about 7% of the national population; two Cardinals (in the history of the Vietnamese Catholic Church, up to now, six bishops have been elevated to the rank of cardinal); three incumbent archbishops; 46 bishops; over 5,000 secular priests and order priests; around 32,000 monks and nuns; around 9,000 religious establishments (churches, religious houses, training centers, bishopric headquarters, religious orders); 11 educational establishments including one Catholic Institute, nine Grand Seminaries, and one branch of a Grand Seminary.

### **3. Protestantism**

Protestantism was introduced into Vietnam by The Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. CMA established its first base in 1911 in the city of Da Nang. In 1927, the Evangelical Church of French Indochina was established and after several name changes in 1936 and 1945, it was referred to as the Vietnamese Evangelical Church in 1950. In 1954, the country was temporarily divided into two regions and Protestantism in each region was different. In the North, about 1,000 followers and some of the officials of the Vietnamese Evangelical Church established the Northern Vietnamese Evangelical Church in 1958, with operations reaching as far as Nghe An Province. In 1962, the Church approved its first Charter.

In the South, during the years 1954-1975, CMA pushed for investments in economic, resources, and missionaries to help strengthen and expand the Evangelical Church of Vietnam's religious, economic, cultural, and social foundations, especially in the preaching to ethnic minority areas in the Central Highlands. During this period, in the South, in addition to the pre-existing Evangelical Church of Vietnam, there were over two dozen other sects and international Protestant organizations. By 1975, Protestantism in Vietnam had around 187,000 followers, mostly active in southern provinces.

Compared to most of the religions that entered from foreign countries, Protestantism is a later arrival in Vietnam. However, it has established itself and has a distinct impact on the lifestyle and culture in some communities. Protestantism has affected and changed the way of life in a portion of the population who follow the religion; it counsels its followers to abandon heavy rituals in funerals or weddings, etc.; it guides them to live a religious life following the example of love and the spirit of serving God.

Up to now, 11 Protestant organizations have been recognized by the government as religious organizations and granted registration certificates for religious activities as follows:

- The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) was recognized as a religious organization in 1958. Its guiding principle is “Living out the Gospel, serving God, serving the Fatherland and the Nation.”

- The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) was recognized as a religious organization in 2001. Its guiding principle is “Living out the Gospel, serving God, serving the Fatherland and the Nation.”

- The Vietnam Christian Mission was recognized as a religious organization in 2007. Its guiding principle is “Living out the Gospel, serving God, serving the Fatherland.”

– The Baptist Churches in Vietnam was recognized as a religious organization in 2008. Its guiding principle is “Living out the Gospel, serving God, faithfully serving the Fatherland and the Nation.”

– The Baptist Convention of Vietnam was recognized as a religious organization in 2008. Its guiding principle is “Living out the Gospel, serving God, serving the Fatherland, being loyal to the Nation and abiding by the law.”

– The Presbyterian Church in Vietnam was recognized as a religious organization in 2008. Its guiding principle is “Praising God, loving people and abiding by Vietnamese law.”

– The Mennonite Church in Vietnam was recognized as a religious organization in 2009. Its guiding principle is “Living out the Gospel, serving God, loving peace and non-violence.”

– The Christian Fellowship Church in Vietnam was recognized as a religious organization in 2010. Its guiding principle is “Being faithful to the truth of the Bible and attached to the Nation, observing the Constitution and laws.”

– The Assemblies of God of Vietnam was recognized as a religious organization in 2019. Its guiding principle is “Living by the word of God, serving God, serving the Fatherland – the Nation, and observing Vietnamese laws.”

– The Vietnam Full Gospel Church was granted a registration certificate for religious activities in 2018. Its guiding principle is “Worshiping God, loving all people, living out the Gospel, observing the laws, and being attached to the Nation.”

– The Vietnam United Gospel Outreach Church was granted a registration certificate for religious activities in 2018. Its guiding principle is “Honoring God, loving people; worshiping God, preaching the Gospel, building the Church, living out the Gospel, serving the Fatherland and the Nation; abiding by the Constitution and law.”

The General Assembly is the largest religious activity of the Evangelical Church in terms of organizational structure. It has the task of discussing and deciding on important organizational matters during a term, including electing the leadership, constructing or modifying the Charter. Depending on the organization, the General Assembly can be held every two, four, or five years.

In training activities, there are currently two religious education institutions of Evangelicalism, including: (1) the Bible Theological Institute of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South); (2) the Hanoi Bible Theological School of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North). In addition to concentrated training at the religious education institutions, the Protestant organizations open theological training courses, Bible retreats and spiritual exercise session annually.



Charitable deeds and social welfare are also given importance by Vietnamese Protestant organizations and their activity in this regard has achieved many results. In recent years, they have pushed up such charitable activities as offering New Year gifts, building charitable houses for poor families, supporting communities affected by natural disasters, providing scholarships for poor students, providing wheelchairs and other assistive devices for people with disabilities, establishing job-counseling centers, and supporting-rehab centers.

Many Vietnamese Protestant organizations have relationships and partnerships with Protestant organizations in countries around the world in such fields as theology training and mission, publishing religious publications, charitable activities, academic exchanges, and organizing events. Through these activities, the Vietnamese Protestant organizations contribute to promoting Vietnamese culture in general and the Christian culture with distinct Vietnamese characteristics to other nations.

As of December 2021, the country had over 1.2 million Protestants, more than 2,300 religious dignitaries, nearly 900 religious centers, nearly 100 organizations of different denominations, nearly 800 religiously dependent organizations, and about 5,500 small groups. There are about 9,000 foreigners practicing religion at 61 small groups.

#### 4. Caodaism

Caodaism is a religion founded in Vietnam in 1926, by a group of officials, bourgeois, landowners and intellectuals such as Ngo Minh Chieu, Pham Cong Tac, Le Van Trung, Vuong Quan Ky, Cao Quynh Cu, and Cao Hoai Sang. Initially, Caodaism was a unified religious organization with a Holy See located in Tay Ninh, but later it developed into various different religious organizations.

The canon laws of Caodaism are based on the Five Precepts and the Four Virtues. The Five Precepts are: not to kill living beings, not to steal or deceive others, to refrain from sexual misconduct, to avoid excessive eating and drinking, and to stop lying and breaking promises. The Four Virtues are: to conform to the words of superiors, to live in harmony with others; not to boast nor to be arrogant; to be fair and transparent when it comes to money; not to behave hypocritically.

The ceremonies of Caodaism are quite elaborate and complex, reflecting the spirit of “peaceful coexistence of religions”. Caodaists worship the “Great Divine Eye” which symbolizes Supreme God for them. Its places of worship include the Holy See temple located at the Central Cao Dai Church and there are also smaller holy sites at Caodaist local parishes.

Since 1995 up to now, ten Caodaist congregations and one Cao Dai sect have been recognized by the Vietnamese

Government as religious organizations and granted registration certificates for religious operation, including:

– Cao Dai Tien Thien Church recognized as a religious organization in 1995.

– Cao Dai Minh Chon Church recognized as a religious organization in 1996.

– Cao Dai Chieu Minh Long Chau Church recognized as a religious organization in 1996.

– Cao Dai Missionary Church recognized as a religious organization in 1996.

– Cao Dai Tay Ninh Holy See recognized as a religious organization in 1997.

– Cao Dai Reform Section recognized as a religious organization in 1997.

– Cao Dai Bach Y Lien Doan Chon Ly Church recognized as a religious organization in 1998.

– Cao Dai Chon Ly Church recognized as a religious organization in 2000.

– Cao Dai Cau Kho - Tam Quan Church recognized as a religious organization in 2000.

– Vietnam Cao Dai Church (Binh Duc) recognized as a religious organization in 2011.

– Cao Dai Chieu Minh Tam Thanh Vo Vi granted a registration certificate for religious activities in 2009, which is a religious sect of Caodaism.

The Cao Dai Churches and organizations all share the same guide for practice: practicing within the framework of the Constitution and law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, advocating national unity and harmony, promoting equality and respect among different religions.

The organizational structure of Cao Dai temples and organizations consists of two levels: at the central level is the Church (Congregation); at the grassroots level is the Caodaist parish. In provinces and cities with a large number of Caodaist dignitaries and followers, a Representative Committee or Representatives are established to assist the central Church in directing religious activities at the grassroots level.

The Cao Dai Churches and organizations coordinate their work in such fields as education and training for dignitaries, media communication, and social charity. These activities contribute to enhancing their religious solidarity.

Cao Dai Churches and organizations actively carry out social charity activities, with a focus on caring for the health of the community, helping people in need, and providing assistance to the sick and impoverished. Currently, there are 93 traditional medical clinics, 135 medicine dispensaries, and 11 elderly care facilities belonging to Caodaism, along with other facilities.

As of December 2021, Cao Dai Churches and organizations had over 1.2 million followers, more than 13,000 dignitaries, 26,000 officers, 1,300 religious establishments in 38 provinces and cities nationwide, with the majority concentrated in southern regions such as Tay Ninh, Long An, Ben Tre, Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Thap, Tien Giang, Can Tho, Vinh Long, Kien Giang, Ca Mau, and An Giang.

## **5. Hoa Hao Buddhism**

Hoa Hao Buddhism was founded by Mr. Huynh Phu So (whose followers venerate him as the Virtuous Founder Huynh) on May 18, the year of the Earth-Cat (1939) in Hoa Hao village, Tan Chau district, Chau Doc province (now Phu My town, Phu Tan district, An Giang province).

Hoa Hao Buddhism practices Buddhism but does not worship any statues or paintings. The icon of Hoa Hao Buddhism is a maroon cloth (Tran Da) with the belief that “the Buddha is in the heart, the heart is the Buddha.” In addition to worshipping the Buddha and ancestors, Hoa Hao Buddhism extols and worships national heroes and those who have rendered meritorious services. The essential dogma of Hoa Hao Buddhism is “to study Buddhism and to cultivate oneself”. According to Hoa Hao Buddhism, “self-cultivation” creates “merits”, while “learning Buddhism” creates “virtue”, and therefore,

only when having merits and virtue can one become a noble person.

The Hoa Hao Buddhism Church was recognized by the government as a religious organization in 1999 and has gone through five General Assemblies. Its 2019 Charter affirms that the guiding direction of Hoa Hao Buddhism is “For the sake of the Dharma, and for the sake of the Nation”, and the guiding principles of Hoa Hao Buddhism are to *study Buddhism, cultivate oneself, and practice Buddhism at home* as well as to instruct followers about the Four Debts of Gratitude (Gratitude to the Ancestors and Parents, Gratitude to the Country, Gratitude to the Buddhist Three Treasures, Gratitude to the fellowmen and mankind); the eight precepts; and the traditional teachings of the Hoa Hao founder, the Virtuous Master of Huynh. Additionally, the Hoa Hao Church encourages its members to help those in need, provide mutual support in the four major rites in a human life—coming of age, Marriage, Death, and Death anniversary celebration)—and to contribute positively to society.

The Hoa Hao Buddhist Church has a two-level organizational structure: the central level is the Central Executive Council of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church; at the grassroots level there are the Executive Committees of Hoa Hao Buddhist Church in communes, wards, and towns. In some provinces and cities with large numbers of followers,

there is a provincial-level Representative Committee of Hoa Hao Buddhist Church acting as a bridge between the Central Executive Council and the Executive Committees in communes, wards, and towns.

In 2016, with the increasing need for training and development of Hoa Hao officials, and with the approval of the government, the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church established the Hoa Hao Buddhist Intermediate School. In addition, it also holds basic dogma classes to train preachers.

Social and charitable activities are a distinctive feature and a way of religious practice for the officials and followers of Hoa Hao Buddhism, and also demonstrate their positive attitude in the integration of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. The Hoa Hao Buddhist Church has a wide variety of social and charitable activities, without any racial or religious prejudices, and makes significant contributions to social welfare: building anew or repairing rural bridges, repairing or upgrading roads, repairing or building charitable houses, donating rice and money to relief efforts in flood-affected areas, providing free traditional medicines for people, supporting poor patients in medical treatment, etc.

As of December 2021, the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church had more than 1.5 million followers, 4,000 officials, and 50 State-recognized places of worship. The distribution

of followers of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church is found in 22 provinces and cities, yet mostly concentrated in nine provinces in the Southwestern region, including An Giang, Can Tho, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, Ben Tre, Hau Giang, Tien Giang, Long An, and Kien Giang.

The headquarters of the Central Executive Council of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church is located in An Hoa pagoda, Phu My town, Phu Tan district, An Giang province.

## **6. Islam**

Islam was introduced into the Cham ethnic community in Vietnam around the 10th century. Upon arrival in Vietnam, it was influenced by the long-standing cultural and religious traditions of the local Brahmanism as well as the system of indigenous beliefs in a matriarchal society. This caused its fusion with the existing local cultural and moral values of the Cham people, resulting in the formation of two sects: Sunni Cham Islam (Cham Islam) and Bani Cham Islam (Cham Bani).

The Cham Islam and Cham Bani have a deep-rooted religious belief in Allah and the Qur'an. However, that belief is different in the implementation of the Islamic canon law between the two groups: the Cham Islam observe the Islamic canon law almost completely and in a manner that is more religious, with a deeper religious factor; the Cham Bani observe the Islamic canon law in a representative



manner, not fully performing the five daily prayers (only performed during Ramadan). In addition, the Cham Bani are deeply influenced by Brahmanism and the local beliefs with a matriarchal system and polytheistic beliefs, with a strong ethnic factor. Islamic followers live concentrated in 12 provinces and cities: An Giang, Ho Chi Minh City, Tay Ninh, Dong Nai, Ninh Thuan, Kien Giang, Tra Vinh, Tien Giang, Long An, Can Tho, Binh Phuoc, and Hanoi. Bani Islam followers reside mainly in Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, and Binh Phuoc.

In Vietnam, there are currently over 80,000 Islamic followers, over 1,000 religious dignitaries and officials, and 89 Islamic worship facilities. Among them, Cham Islam has around 30,000 followers, over 600 religious dignitaries and officials, and 64 worship facilities; Bani Cham has about 50,000 followers, over 400 religious dignitaries and officials, and 25 worship facilities.

In terms of organizational structure, currently there are six Islamic organizations recognized by the State at the provincial and city level, including four Cham Islam organizations and two Cham Bani organizations.

- The Ho Chi Minh City Islamic Community's Representative Committee was recognized as a religious organization in 1992.

- The Representative Committee of the Islamic Community in An Giang province was recognized as a

religious organization in 2004. Its name was changed to the An Giang Islamic Community in 2020.

- The Representative Committee of the Islamic Community in Tay Ninh province was recognized as a religious organization in 2010. Its name was changed to the Tay Ninh Islamic Community in 2020.

- The Representative Committee of the Islamic Community in Ninh Thuan province was recognized as a religious organization in 2012. Its name was changed to the Ninh Thuan Islamic Community in 2022.

- The Cham Bani Imams' Council in Ninh Thuan province was recognized as a religious organization in 2007.

- The Cham Bani Imams' Council in Binh Thuan province was recognized as a religious organization in 2012.

Moreover, in Hanoi, Dong Nai and some other regions, the government recognizes the management boards of the Islamic mosques in areas with Islamic followers and worship facilities.

Islam organizations have their own independent organizational regulations and activities, but they are consistent in their faith and guideline of practice. The general guideline for both Cham Islam and Cham Bani is as follows: worship the Supreme Being (Allah), respect the

Prophet Muhammad and the Holy Book Qur'an, conduct activities in the framework of the law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, advocate religious and national unity, and contribute to the construction and protection of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The Vietnamese Islamic community actively participates in charitable efforts, which are carried out throughout the year, but are particularly important during the month of Ramadan, which is one of the five fundamentals in Islamic dogmas. Such charitable activities include giving gifts to elderly people living alone, poor households and people with disabilities; digging wells to provide clean water for daily life; and providing scholarships and transportation means to disadvantaged students to encourage their passion for education and their effort to overcome difficulties.

The Vietnamese Islamic community has a diverse relationship with the international community; this primarily concerns the Cham Islamic community. The international affairs of the Vietnamese Islamic community are seen through religious activities such as participation in religious rituals (reciting the Qur'an, pilgrimage to the Mecca, Imam training, conferences, studying abroad, etc.) and social welfare activities. The preaching of Islamic dogmas (Dawah) in the Vietnamese Islamic community has been very active in recent years, with the participation

of delegations from Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Saudi Arabia, etc.

## **7. Baha'i Faith**

The Baha'i Faith originated in 1863 in Persia (now Iran) and was founded by Mirza Husayn Ali (1817-1892) who is referred to by his followers as Baha'u'llah (meaning "the Glory of God"). It was introduced into Vietnam in 1954. The first local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i Faith in Vietnam was established on 21 April 1955 in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). The first national Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i Faith was established in 1964. By 1970, there were approximately 95,000 Baha'i followers and by the end of 1975, this number increased to around 205,000 with 687 local Spiritual Assemblies.

The Vietnamese Baha'i community was presented with a registration certificate for religious activities on 28 March 2007 and recognized as a religious organization in 2008. It has a congress term of one year, and as of 2022, it had had 15 congresses. The organizational structure of the Baha'i community in Vietnam consists of two levels: the National Baha'i Spiritual Assembly of Vietnam and the local Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies (at the commune, ward, town, district and provincial levels).

The practicing principle of the Baha'i community in Vietnam is to follow Vietnamese laws, to promote national

and religious unity and harmony, to strive for national economic and social development, and for the civilization of mankind.

The Baha'i community in Vietnam participates in various social activities such as attending conferences, dialoguing with other religious communities on contributing to social development programs, promoting humanitarian charitable activities, and conducting environmental protection and climate change adaptation activities. The community organizes yearly charitable activities, especially during the Ayyam-i-Ha (Days of the Supreme Being) holiday, and these actions are conducted in all areas where there are Baha'i followers.

The Baha'i community in Vietnam regularly interacts with Baha'i communities worldwide. The activities of the Baha'i community in Vietnam are coordinated with Baha'i communities in other countries through the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and the Continental Councils in each continent of the world.

As of December 2021, the Baha'i community in Vietnam had roughly 7,000 followers, residing in 45 provinces and cities across the country, with the largest concentration in some provinces and cities including Hanoi, Da Nang, Quang Nam, Gia Lai, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho, Soc Trang, Hau Giang, and Kien Giang. It does not have any dignitaries

but over 300 officials. On a global scale, the Baha'i Faith has five major temples respectively in the (former) Soviet Union, the USA, Panama, Uganda and Australia, and a spiritual center on Mount Carmel (Israel). In Vietnam, the Baha'i community does not have any collective places of worship; they only conduct religious activities at some local offices and private homes.

### **8. Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association**

The Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association was founded by Mr. Nguyen Van Bong, who was born in 1886 in Tan My commune, An Thanh Thượng district, Sa Dec province (now, Dong Thap province).

The Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association follows the religious dogmas of Buddhism as its foundation; “Study Buddhism, do good deeds, serve the nation, and help the people” are its guiding principle with the credo “Strive for both Blessing and Wisdom”. Here, “Blessing” refers to the result of the good action of contributing one’s time, knowledge, and assets to build and develop traditional medicine (charitable traditional medical clinics) for the purpose of providing free medical treatment for those in need; and it is regarded as a means of creating opportunities for the poor to access Buddhist teachings. “Wisdom” refers to studying Buddhist scriptures and canons to improve one’s intellect and understanding, leading to salvation and happiness. By striving for Wisdom, one can become

enlightened to the need to strive for Blessings; these two efforts are in mutual interaction inside individuals, and should be spread to the entire society. The ultimate goal is to build a harmonious community supportive in times of difficulty or epidemics.

The canon law of the Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association states that all dignitaries, officials and followers must abide by the rule on “taking three refuges”—in the Buddha, in the Dharma, and in the Sangha—and practice the five moral precepts: avoiding killing, stealing, drinking alcohol, sexual misconduct and telling lies.

On 27 November 2007, the Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association was recognized by the Vietnamese government as a religious organization. The structure of the Association consists of three levels: the central level with a Central Executive Committee; the provincial and city level with a provincial and city Executive Committee; and the ward and commune level with a ward and commune Executive Committee. Its places of worship are called “congregational halls”, each having a charitable traditional medical clinic.

Activities of the Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association are held mainly through its system of charitable traditional medical clinics, which is the most important and also the main social welfare activity of this religious organization. Its system of charitable traditional medical

clinics contributes to sharing the burden of providing medical treatment for society and the State.

As of December 2021, the Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association had over 600,000 followers, more than 600 dignitaries, 2,200 officials, and 212 congregational halls (212 traditional medical clinics) distributed in 23 provinces and cities nationwide.

### **9. The Seventh-day Adventist Church**

The Adventist Church of Vietnam was introduced by the Hoa Nam Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church based in Hong Kong, and its first foundation was established in 1929. After 1954, the Adventist Church of Vietnam was officially called the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Viet Nam and is a regional branch of the Southeast Asia Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in its global structure.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Viet Nam was recognized as a religious organization by the Vietnamese government in 2008. It holds a General Assembly every five years. To date, four General Assemblies of this kind have been held.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Viet Nam has determined its guiding principles as follows: “Wholeheartedly worshiping the Holy Trinity; loving and helping fellow human beings; living according to



the Old and New Testaments; fully observing the Ten Commandments so that each Seventh-day Adventist is ready to welcome the second coming of Jesus, concurrently serving the Fatherland, being loyal to the nation, and complying with the law.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Viet Nam participates in, and carries out various social activities initiated by the government and other organizations. The Church’s social activities are focused on five main areas: education (granting scholarships, provision of school equipment), health care (building medical clinics, free medical checkups), combating climate change (reforestation), community construction (building roads, charitable houses, wells, etc.), and humanitarian charity (providing crop plants, livestock for families in need, supporting the poor, caring for orphaned children, etc.).

As of December 2021, the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Viet Nam had around 18,000 followers (70% are people of ethnic minorities); 19 Churches, 175 groups; 214 dignitaries (18 pastors, 196 missionaries); conducting activities in 37 provinces and centrally-governed cities, mainly concentrated in provinces and cities, including Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho, Lam Dong, Dak Lak, Quang Ngai, Binh Phuoc, Dong Nai, and Dien Bien. In 2017, the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Viet Nam was permitted

by the government to establish the Christian Bible College, with the function of training and educating in the intermediate, college and bachelor degrees of Theology.

### **10. Tu An Hieu Nghia (Four Debts of Gratitude) Buddhism**

Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhism was founded by Mr. Ngo Loi in 1867 in Cu Lao Ba (presently, An Phu district, An Giang province). At its start, Mr. Ngo Loi referred to this religion as “Ancestral worship” (*tho ong ba*) religion. From 1870 onwards, this religion was officially named “Tu An Hieu Nghia Faith”. In 2010, the government recognized Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhism as a religious organization under the official name “Tu An Hieu Nghia Faith Association”. In 2020, at the third General Assembly (2020-2025 tenure) of this organization, the name of the religion was changed to “Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhism”, and the name of the organization itself to “Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhist Association”.

The guiding principle of Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhism is “Self-perfection, and study of Buddhism”, and the direction of its practice is “Complying with the four debts of gratitude – Keeping to piety and righteousness – For the sake of national unity”. The dogmas and canon law of Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhism are closely related to Vietnamese social morality and have a positive and humane meaning. The followers of the religion keep themselves not only

to the “Self-perfection, study of Buddhism”, but also to the “Four debts of gratitude” (gratitude to the ancestors and parents, gratitude to the country, gratitude to the Buddhist Three Treasures, and gratitude to the fellowmen and mankind).

The organizational structure of the Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhist Association consists of two levels of religious administration: the central level, which is the Central Executive Committee of the Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhist Association, and the local level, which is the Local Executive Committee.

The Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhist Association frequently carries out social welfare activities, but only within the community and for members of the Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhist community who are facing difficulties. It mobilizes kind-hearted individuals to support social welfare programs such as giving presents, building homes for impoverished families; supporting people in the Central region affected by floods, raising funds for the poor, funds for spring tree planting, education-encouraging funds, building bridges, roads, schools, and medical clinics; and supporting the Covid-19 Response Committee with funds and resources.

As of December 2021, the Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhist Association had 74 places of worship, 500 dignitaries and officials, and around 78,000 followers who reside in 17

out of the 63 provinces and cities, namely An Giang, Vinh Long, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Binh Dinh, Dong Nai, Kien Giang, Dong Thap, Soc Trang, Hau Giang, Ca Mau, Long An, Can Tho, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Ho Chi Minh City, Lam Dong, and Dak Lak. Among them, An Giang province is the center of Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhism with around 36,000 followers, living spread across 11 districts and towns in the province.

### **11. Minh Su Faith (Way of the Enlightened)**

Minh Su Faith has its roots from China; it appeared around the Tang Dynasty, and was introduced into Vietnam during the reign of King Tu Duc (1848-1883). Minh Su can be understood as follows: “Minh” means “bright and comprehending completely”; “Su” refers to “a person who has achieved enlightenment and become a Master”; Minh Su is someone who has comprehended completely and achieved enlightenment to become a Master. The first person to preach it to Vietnam was Patriarch Dong So, who established the Quang Te Buddhist Temple in Ha Tien (now Kien Giang).

The religious dogma system of Minh Su Faith has a principle, with the pure religious purpose of guiding followers to self-cultivation, self-refinement, achieving liberation, and unifying the essence of the three religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The canon law of Minh Su Faith strictly requires followers to observe

vegetarianism and have knowledge of the Chinese classic script, and only after a period of trial can they be initiated into the Faith.

The Minh Su Theravada Buddhist Church was recognized by the government as a religious organization in 2008. Its organizational system consists of two levels: at the Central level is the Senior Council and the Central Executive Committee; at the grassroots level is the Buddhist Worshipping House Executive Committee. In provinces and cities, there are many Buddhist worshipping houses with provincial and city-level executive committees (not an administrative level) to guide the local Buddhist worshipping houses in practicing the religion.

The operating principle of the Minh Su Theravada Buddhist Church is to take the teachings of the Dharma as the highest goal, with dignitaries, monks and followers as the focus. Members practice the Faith on a voluntary, united, harmonious and devotional basis, observing the Dharma, the rules, and complying with national laws.

The religious ceremonies of the Minh Su Theravada Buddhist Church are solemnly held at its worshipping houses, attracting a large number of followers, such as the celebration in honor of the Jade Emperor on the ninth day of the first lunar month, and the Thương ngươn (Spring) celebration on the full moon day of the first lunar month.

Social activities are one of the important missions of the Minh Su Theravada Buddhist Church, implemented with the spirit of “six concords” to serve the religion itself and serve all beings. In recent years, the Church has carried out many charitable activities at its worshipping houses, such as providing free meals, supporting people affected by natural disasters, helping the poor, and supporting gratitude funds.

As of December 2021, the Minh Su Theravada Buddhist Church had over 5,000 followers, more than 150 dignitaries and over 200 officials. It has 52 active temples in 18 cities and provinces: Ben Tre, Long An, Ho Chi Minh City, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Tien Giang, Vinh Long, Ninh Binh, Ha Noi, Kien Giang, Hau Giang, Can Tho, Da Nang, Dong Thap, Khanh Hoa, Phu Yen, Binh Dinh. Its headquarters is located at Quang Nam Buddhist Worshipping House, 17 Tran Quang Khai, Tan Dinh Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City.

## **12. Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple**

The Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple was established in 1924 by six founding members: Au Kiet Lam, Nguyen Van Xung, Nguyen Van De, Le Van Ngoc, Nguyen Van Miet, and Vo Van Thanh. During the development of the sect, the founders had built and perfected their organizational system, religious dogmas, canon law, and scriptures to serve the followers.

The religious dogmas of Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple are based on the essence of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism to guide followers in self-cultivation, self-awareness, kindness, and building a peaceful and harmonious society. The Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple does not worship statues, but instead uses worshipping tablets, and Vietnamese scriptures to facilitate learning and spreading religious beliefs. It focuses on practice at its religious establishments, not on initiating many people into it, so the number of followers is small.

The Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple was recognized as a religious organization by the government in 2008. The organizational structure of this religion includes two levels: the central level with the Church Council and the Church Executive Committee, and the local level with Chapters.

For the purpose of spiritual practice for self-discipline and compassion, the benevolent work of the Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple is always given attention and actively done, which includes providing financial aid for victims of Agent Orange, sharing difficulties with communities affected by natural disasters, especially floods, in the Central region. In 2011, the Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple opened a charitable medical clinic at Tam Tong Temple, No. 82 Cao Thang, District 3, Ho Chi Minh City, with the purpose of providing medical examinations, diagnosis and treatment for people with no discrimination whatsoever.

As of December 2021, the Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple had 650 followers, around 100 dignitaries, 100 officials, and 4 religious facilities. Its activities are carried out mostly in Long An and Ba Ria - Vung Tau provinces, and Ho Chi Minh City.

### **13. Brahmanism**

Brahmanism is a religion formed in India and was early adopted by the Cham community in Vietnam. Through development stages, the Chams filtered out what was not suitable for their local community lifestyle from the religious dogmas of Brahmanism, yet incorporated their own cultural elements, forming a distinct religion: Brahmanism of the Chams.

The religious dogmas and canon laws of Brahmanism as a religion of the Chams in Vietnam do not have a clear system and have lost the original regulations of the original Brahmanism. They have been localized and blended into the customs and practices of the Chams themselves. Ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals, as well as worship rituals, all have the local characteristics of the Cham society of the past. Brahmanism is a religion that places great importance on patriarchy, yet upon being introduced into the matriarchal society of the Chams, it had undergone many changes.

However, the basic elements in the dogmas and canon law of Cham Brahmanism are still preserved within the



Cham Brahman community in the form of religious beliefs, customs, and specific regulations related to the life of the Cham Brahman and their moral taboos in their life.

Despite practicing a religion of foreign origins, the Cham Brahman community in Vietnam has very little international ties, and religious activities take place only within the confines of temples, communal houses, and shrines. Additionally, Brahmanism in Vietnam is heavily influenced by the matriarchal system.

Two religious organizations of the Cham Brahman were officially recognized by the State in 2012: 1) the Dignitaries Council of the Cham Brahman community in Ninh Thuan province, and 2) the Dignitaries Council of the Cham Brahman community in Binh Thuan province. The tenure of these Cham Brahman Councils lasts for five years. The Dignitaries Councils of the Cham Brahman community in Ninh Thuan and that in Binh Thuan have held three congresses up to now.

Social charitable activities of the Cham Brahman community are done through practical programs such as contributing to the Fund for the poor and gratitude funds, supporting locals affected by natural disasters, supporting the construction of Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands, participating in the environmental protection and climate change prevention drives initiated by the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Fatherland Front, and

participating in locally organized education-encouraging programs.

The Cham Brahman live mainly in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces, where there are over 66,000 followers, more than 400 dignitaries and officials. Their main places of worship make up a system of temples, towers and other small establishments such as shrines, tombs, residences, and pagodas. Currently, in both Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan, there are 42 religious establishments of this kind. Most of them date back to ancient times and are recognized as historical and cultural relics.

#### **14. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded in 1830 in Fayette, New York, USA. Its headquarters is located in Salt Lake City, Utah State, USA. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints organized globally with a hierarchical system—central (global), regional (continental level), and stake, district (national level)—operates in over 189 countries and territories.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was introduced into Vietnam in 1962 and is part of the worldwide church as an Asian regional district. As of 1975, the Church had around 1,000 members. In 1995, two congregations were formed respectively in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

day Saints in Vietnam was officially presented with a registration certificate for religious operation in 2019.

The principles, objectives, and direction of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Vietnam are as follows: worshiping God, connecting and encouraging those with the same faith to build strong families, serving the community and complying with the Constitution and law of Vietnam.

Humanitarian, medical, and educational activities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are separated from religious activities. Religious activities are carried out by the Coordination Committee; while humanitarian charitable activities are carried out by the Latter-day Saints Charity (LDSC)—the humanitarian fund of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, through a non-governmental organization channel. LDSC has implemented many humanitarian programs in Vietnam, typically: (1) collaborating with the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs to donate 5,000 wheelchairs and 1,000 crutches to people with disabilities in Vietnam in the period of 2019-2021; and (2) supporting the Vaccine Fund, donating ventilators and many valuable gifts and devices for the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in Vietnam with an amount of up to dozens of VND billions. The Vietnam Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints encourages its members to participate in community

service projects, particularly projects serving those in need, poverty or disease, etc.

As of December 2021, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Vietnam had over 2,300 members active at 11 branches in provinces and cities across the country; four officials are members of the Church Coordinating Board.

### **15. Buu Son Ky Huong Faith**

Buu Son Ky Huong Faith was founded by Mr. Doan Minh Huyen in 1849 (the year of the Earth Rooster) at the Mr. Dao Kien Hermitage (now Tay An ancient pagoda, Long Kien commune, Cho Moi district, An Giang province).

The religious dogmas of the Buu Son Ky Huong Faith is “Self-perfection and studying Buddhism” and practicing “Four debts of gratitude” (gratitude to Heaven, gratitude to the King, gratitude to the Parents, gratitude to the Teacher); later “Four debts of gratitude” are understood as gratitude to the Ancestors and Parents, gratitude to the Country, gratitude to the Buddhist Three Treasures, and gratitude to Fellowmen and Humankind.

Buu Son Ky Huong Faith takes “Three refuges and Five precepts” as the canon law. The “Three refuges” refers to the voluntary commitment of followers to abiding by the teachings of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

The “Five precepts” consist of abstention from killing, sexual misconduct, greed, drinking, gambling, smoking, divination, superstition, malicious speech, deceit, lies, and sarcasm causing division.

Followers of Buu Son Ky Huong Faith consider “self-cultivation” as a principle in spiritual practice to encourage people to avoid bad actions and to do good things; to improve their moral standards; and to accumulate virtue for future chances to join the “Hoi Long Hoa” (Dragon-Flower Assembly). “Self-cultivation” also enables the followers to always live in accordance with the principles of morality, to help their family and society, and to maintain traditional ethical qualities such as humaneness, rightness, decorum, wisdom, and trustworthiness.

Buu Son Ky Huong Faith does not have any congregational organization, so the basic organizational structure of the religion is the Buu Son Ky Huong Pagoda as the pagoda is an independent entity, a place of common worship for the religious community. They can participate in religious activities at the pagodas established by Mr. Doan Minh Huyen or his disciples in different regions. The pagoda is also the hub for operating, organizing and managing all rituals and religious activities both internally and externally of this religion. Therefore, the mode of the management of the Buu Son Ky Huong Pagoda varies by region.

As of December 2021, there were about 10,000 followers of Buu Son Ky Huong Faith concentrated in the provinces of An Giang, Dong Thap, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Long An, Soc Trang, Vinh Long, Tien Giang and Ben Tre; eight places of worship have been granted registration certificates for religious activities and correspondingly, their Executive Committees and Management Committees are recognized by the State.

### **16. Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism**

Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism is an indigenous religion founded by Mr. Nguyen Ngoc An in 1915 in Kien Giang. Its purpose is to practice “Peace – Compassion – Kindness – Study of Buddhism – Self-cultivation - Repaying the “Four debts of gratitude”; the principles of operation are “Buddhist doctrine – Dharma – Piety – Nation”.

The Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhist Organization was granted a registration certificate for religious activity by the State in 2016. Its headquarters is located at An Binh worshiping house, Cu Xa Street, Kien Luong town, Kien Luong district, Kien Giang province.

Organizations, individuals, officials and followers of Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism practice and carry out religious activities in accordance with the tradition of the religion, and organize social charitable activities in accordance with the law and regulations. On 9-10 June

2022, Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism held its First General Assembly for the 2022-2025 term. This is a prerequisite for the sect towards being recognized as a religious organization by the State.

As of December 2021, Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism had eight places of worship (including five pagodas, three *am* (*am* is smaller than a pagoda), and one *côc* or hermitage), with approximately 6,500 followers living in An Giang, Dong Thap and Kien Giang provinces, and Can Tho City. Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism does not have a team of dignitaries, but just officials in charge of religious activities at pagodas and the hermitage; they are much respected in the community of followers as devout and trustworthy individuals.





## CHAPTER II

# RELIGIOUS POLICY IN VIETNAM

### **1. The Communist Party of Vietnam's viewpoint on religion and belief in the period of national renewal**

In the course of leading the revolution and managing the country, the Communist Party of Vietnam always pays attention to religion and has had sound approaches to religion appropriate to each stage of the revolution.

In 1986, Vietnam ushered in the era of national renewal (Doi Moi) marked by the Resolution of the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, with the policy of comprehensive renovation in the economic, cultural and social aspects. Concerning religion and religious work, the 6th Party National Congress affirmed that *the Party and State of Vietnam, always as one, implement the policy of respecting freedom of belief. [It is necessary] to lead and help religious compatriots unite to build a new life and enthusiastically participate in the defense of the Fatherland.* These are some of the guiding

views of fundamental significance for Vietnam's policy and law on religion.

In 1990, the Communist Party of Vietnam had a separate policy on religion, stating that "*Religion is an issue in long-term existence; belief and religion are the spiritual need of a portion of the people; religious morality contains many elements commensurate with the task of building a new society. The consistent policy of the Party and State is to respect the people's right to freedom of belief, to practice the unity of religious and non-religious people to build and defend the Fatherland.*"

During the 1990-2003 period, the Communist Party of Vietnam issued numerous documents on religious issues. Directive 37-CT/TW dated 2 July 1998 of the Politburo on religious work in the new situation affirmed: *Religious activities that benefit the people and are in line with the aspirations and legitimate interests of the faithful, are guaranteed, and the cultural and moral values of religion are respected and encouraged to be promoted. Respect and ensure the right to freedom of belief and religion and freedom of non-belief and non-religion of citizens.* The 5th Conference of the 8th Party Central Committee on 16 July 1998 on building an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity, in the section on cultural policy towards religion, stated that "*Encouraging ideas of justice, kindness, and goodwill... in religion.*" Thus, the Party is aware of the goodwill, the

good cultural and ethical values of religions that need to be promoted, contributing to the building of a progressive Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity.

After 13 years of implementing the reform policy towards religion, summarizing the practical experience and considering the emerging issues, in the context of significant changes both domestic and global, on 12 March 2003, at the 7th Conference, the 9th Party Central Committee issued Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW *regarding religious work*. The document has become the foundation of the policy of the Party and State of Vietnam towards religion in the Doi Moi era.

Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW shows the consistency of the views and policies towards religion stated in the previously-issued Party documents, and affirms: *Religious activities and religious work must aim at strengthening the unity of the religious community within the great national unity bloc, bring into play the synergy of the whole nation, successfully implement the cause of industrialization and modernization of the country, build and firmly protect the Fatherland, for the purpose of a wealthy people, strong country, a fair, democratic and civilized society.*

Resolution 25-NQ/TW emphasizes five policy lines towards religion as follows:

1. Religious belief and religion are the spiritual needs of a portion of the people, which are present and will

exist with the nation in the course of building a socialist society in our country. Religious compatriots are part of the great national unity bloc. Consistently implement the policy of respecting and guaranteeing the right to freedom of religious belief, to either follow or not follow a certain religion, and the right to normal religious activities in accordance with the law. Religions operate in the framework of the law and are equal before the law.

2. The Communist Party and the State implement the policy of uniting all ethnic groups. People are united, regardless of their religious beliefs, and those who follow a religion and those who do not. The positive values of the tradition of ancestor worship should be preserved and promoted; those who have made meritorious contributions to the Fatherland and the people should be honored. Discrimination against citizens based on belief or religion is strictly prohibited. At the same time, the exploitation of religion to engage in superstitious activities, illegal activities, and activities that undermine the policies of the State, incite division among the people, or ethnic groups, cause trouble, and infringe on national security is strictly prohibited.

3. The core content of religious work is mass mobilization. The goals of a wealthy people, a strong country, an equal, democratic and civilized society are common points to bind the people of different religions together for a common cause. All citizens, regardless of

belief or religion, have the right and obligation to build and defend the Fatherland. The work of mobilizing the followers of different religions should encourage our compatriots to uphold the patriotic spirit, the sense of protecting the independence and unity of the Fatherland; through the good implementation of socio-economic, security and defense policies, ensuring the material and spiritual interests of the people in general, including those of religious compatriots.

4. Religious work is the responsibility of the entire political system. Religious work is related to many areas of social life, at all levels, sectors and regions. Doing well in religious work is the responsibility of the entire political system led by the Party. The organizational apparatus and the contingent of specialized cadres doing religious work with direct responsibility should be consolidated and perfected. The state management of religions and the fight against the abuse of religion to oppose the regime can only be successful if mass mobilization is well-executed.

5. All believers have the right to freely practice their religion at home and at lawful places of worship in accordance with the law. Religious organizations recognized by the State are allowed to operate under the law and are protected by law. They are allowed to carry out religious activities, establish educational institutions to train dignitaries and religious practitioners, publish

scriptures, and preserve, repair and build their own religious worship establishments in accordance with the law. Religious practices, preaching as well as all other religious activities must comply with the Constitution and the law; must not take advantage of religion to propagate evil faiths, conduct superstitious activities, and must not force people to follow a particular religion. Illegal missionary organizations, missionaries or missionary work and violation of the Constitution and the law are prohibited.

Vietnam's consistent stance on respecting and ensuring freedom of belief and religion continues to be affirmed in the documents of the Party National Congress. In the Documents of the 13th Party National Congress (January 2021), it is determined: *To successfully achieve the goal of religious unity and great national unity. To guarantee the freedom of belief and religion of all people in accordance with the law. To promote the cultural values and good ethics of religion in preserving and enhancing traditional social ethics, to build a cultured life in residential areas, contributing to preventing social evils.* While evaluating the achievements and deficiencies related to the religious work, the Communist Party of Vietnam has outlined tasks and solutions for the coming time as follows: *To create favorable conditions for religious organizations to operate in accordance with the law; to actively support and deal with people's needs for religion, belief, and spirituality, while*

*actively prevent and resolutely fight against the exploitation of beliefs and religions to divide, undermine the great national unity bloc. To improve the capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of State management of religious affairs.* The Documents of the 13th Party Congress has many newly-added and updated contents on religion, which are the valuable contributions of leaders and managers in religious affairs, scholars, and religious followers and dignitaries. This serves as a basis for guidance in the perception and effective implementation of religious work, for continuing to promote the “resources of religions” for the cause of national construction and defense in the new situation, and concurrently, for thwarting any schemes and activities of hostile forces intended to sow division, exploit belief and religion to undermine the Vietnamese revolution. Continuing to well implement the religious policies is a significant contribution to the stability and sustainable development of the country.

## **2. Vietnam's laws on belief and religion**

### **2.1. The right to freedom of belief and religion stipulated in the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam**

The right to freedom of belief and religion is always respected and guaranteed by the State of Vietnam and affirmed in the highest legally-binding document: the Constitution. Throughout the stages of national

development, the Constitution of Vietnam has been amended, supplemented and improved to ensure better protection of the right to freedom of religion and belief of the people.

After the success of the August 1945 Revolution, in 1946, the first Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established, affirming the freedom of religious belief as one of the five fundamental rights of citizens. Article 10, Chapter II of the Constitution specifying the duties and rights of citizens clearly stated: “*Vietnamese citizens have the rights to: freedom of speech, freedom of publication, freedom of organization and assembly, freedom of belief, freedom of residence and the right to travel both within the country and abroad.*” With the declaration of respect for citizens’ freedom of belief, the 1946 Constitution provided a legal basis for the implementation of policies towards religion throughout the country. The Constitution was indeed of epochal value because just two years later (1948), the right to freedom of belief and religion was recognized in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*”



In the 1959 Constitution approved by the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 31 December 1959, the right to freedom of belief and religion was reaffirmed and expanded. Citizens had not only the right to “follow a religion”, but also the right to “not follow any religion”. Article 26, Chapter III, Fundamental Rights and Obligations of Citizens, stated: *Citizens of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have the right to freedom of belief, to follow or not to follow any religion.*

Inheriting and developing the 1946 and 1959 Constitutions, the 1980 Constitution not only recognized the right to freedom of belief and religion, or the lack thereof, but also regulated the prevention of using religion for illegal actions or against government policies: *“Citizens have the right to freedom of belief and religion, to follow or not to follow any religion; no one is allowed to use religion to violate the law and policies of the State”* (Article 68, Chapter V, Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens).

Entering the era of national renewal, in the face of rapid changes in the situation and requirements for national construction and development, citizens’ right to freedom of belief and religion continued to be affirmed in the 1992 Constitution. At the same time, the 1992 Constitution also expressed the views on equality between religions and the State’s responsibility to protect the places of worship of all beliefs and religions. Article

70 of the 1992 Constitution clearly stated: *Citizens have the right to freedom of belief and religion, to follow or not to follow a religion. All religions are equal before the law. Places of worship of all beliefs and religions are protected by law. No one may infringe upon the freedom of belief and religion or take advantage of belief and religion to violate the laws and policies of the State.*

In response to the demands of the comprehensive renovation, in order to meet the development requirements in the new period, on 28 November 2013, the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam passed the 2013 Constitution (which took effect since 1 January 2014) consisting of 11 Chapters and 120 Articles. The 2013 Constitution, as the latest constitution, has many new points, in which one important innovation is the expression of Vietnam's unambiguous stance on human rights and obligations.

The 2013 Constitution upholds the value of human rights and citizens' rights to be recognized, respected, protected and guaranteed. This provision is not only the commitment of the Vietnamese State to implementing the international legal documents on human rights (the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) to which Vietnam is a member, but also reflects its responsibility to the world.

In particular, the 2013 Constitution highlights three new aspects regarding freedom of religion and belief, expressing the Vietnamese State's views on human rights and citizens' rights, which are becoming increasingly improved, democratic, and equal, that is: (1) The right to freedom of belief and religion is an important content of Chapter II on human rights and the rights and duties of citizens; (2) Freedom of belief and religion is the right of all people; (3) The State respects and protects the right to freedom of religion and belief. The 2013 Constitution is the highest legal basis for people to protect and exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief.

Article 24 of the 2013 Constitution stipulates the following: *“1. Everyone has the right to freedom of belief, religion, either to follow or not to follow any religion. Religions are equal before the law; 2. The State respects and protects the right to freedom of belief and religion; 3. No one may infringe on freedom of belief or religion or take advantage of belief or religion to violate the law”*.

The 2013 Constitution shows an important innovation regarding the subject of freedom of belief and religion, which is the right of not only Vietnamese “citizens” but also of “all people”, without restrictions based on nationality, gender or age, etc. The 2013 Constitution emphasizes the role and responsibility of the State in recognizing, respecting, implementing, and

protecting human rights and civil rights, including the right to freedom of belief and religion.

For the first time the limitation of rights is enshrined as a principle in the 2013 Constitution. Article 14 stipulates: *Human rights and citizens' rights can only be limited by the provisions of law in case of necessity for the interests of national defense, security, social order and safety, public health and moral ethics.* Human rights and citizenship are subject to the full determination of people and citizens and can only be limited by the provisions of law in necessary cases. Accordingly, the right to freedom of belief and religion is a human right, and the restriction on freedom of belief and religion must be specified in detail and regulated by law.

The 2013 Constitution defines the authority of the National Assembly and that of the Government in making decisions on religious policies and state management of religion. This provision leads to the need to work out laws to specify and fully embody the stipulations and spirit of the 2013 Constitution on freedom of belief and religion.

The recognition of the right to freedom of belief and religion in the 2013 Constitution once again affirms the consistent policy of respecting people's right to freedom of belief and religion; creates an important legal environment for religious organizations and individuals engaged in religious activities; ensures compatibility with international conventions to which Vietnam is a party of;

and is a significant step in building a stable and sustainable relationship between the State and religious organizations.

It can be seen that, compared to previous Constitutions, the 2013 Constitution is a significant step in constitutionalizing the right to freedom of belief and religion, demonstrating the inheritance and development in the era of Vietnam's modernization and deeper integration with the world. The 2013 Constitution shows democratic approach and policy of the State towards belief and religion, considers the latter a need and an fundamental/indispensable right of everyone, which needs to be respected and protected and facilitated for everyone to best exercise that right.

## **2.2. Regulations on belief and religious activities in current legal documents**

In order to ensure the right to freedom of religion and belief as prescribed by the 2013 Constitution and in accordance with the reality of belief and religious activities in Vietnam, on 18 November 2016, the 14th National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, at its second session, passed the Law on Belief and Religion. The Government issued Decree No. 162/2017/ND-CP dated 30 December 2017, *detailing a number of provisions and implementation measures for the Law on Belief and Religion* (Decree No. 162). The Law on Belief and Religion itself and Decree 162 came into effect on 1 January 2018. These are

the current legal documents regulating the field of belief and religion in Vietnam.

The basic content about freedom of belief and religion in the current law of Vietnam is as follows:

***– The right to freedom of belief and religion is a right of everyone***

The Law on Belief and Religion stipulates: *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of belief and religion, to follow or not follow a religion.* Thus, the Law has expanded the subject of the right to freedom of belief and religion, from “citizens” to “everyone”, reflecting the true nature of freedom of religion and belief as a right for all people, in line with the spirit of the 2013 Constitution.

The Law on Belief and Religion stipulates: Each person has the right to express the faith in belief and religion; practice belief-related and religious rites; participate in religious ceremonies; study and practice dogmas and canon laws; has the right to take vows at religious establishments; study at religious training establishments and attend refresher courses on religion. Minors are required to have prior consent of their parents or guardians before taking vows at a religious establishment or studying at a religious training establishment. Religious dignitaries, officials and religious practitioners shall have the right to perform religious rites, preach and disseminate religions at religious establishments or other lawful locations.

***– Rights of religious organizations and subordinate religious organizations***

The Law on Belief and Religion regulates that religious organizations and subordinate religious organizations have the right to carry out religious activities in compliance with the Charters, statutes, and documents thereon of religious organizations; organize religious practices; publish scriptures and other publications about religions; produce, export and import religious cultural products and religious articles; renovate, upgrade and construct new religious establishments; receive lawful assets donated voluntarily by domestic and foreign organizations and individuals; in compliance with the provisions of the Law on Belief and Religion and other provisions of relevant laws.

***– The right to use scriptures and express the faith in beliefs and religions of people under management or detention***

The Law on Belief and Religion stipulates: People kept in custody and detention according to the provisions of the legislation on enforcement of temporary custody and detention; people serving imprisonment sentences; people put into reformatory schools, compulsory educational establishments, compulsory detoxification establishments shall be entitled to use scriptures and express their faith in beliefs and religions. This is a new regulation of the Law on Belief and Religion, reflecting the profound humanity

as well as the responsibility of the State of Vietnam in recognizing, respecting, protecting and ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion of all people (including those under management and detention).

Detailing the above content, Decree No. 162 stipulates: people under management and detention may use scriptures legally published in the form of a printed book to serve the practice of belief or religion, and to manifest their faith in belief or religion by their speech or behaviors in accordance with the regulations of law on detention centers, custody centers, prisons, reformatories, compulsory education institutions and compulsory rehabilitation centers; the use of this right shall not affect other people's right to freedom of religion and belief and right to freedom of non-belief and non-religion, and shall not be contrary to the relevant regulations of law.

***- State's liabilities to secure the right to freedom of belief and religion***

The Law on Freedom of Belief and Religion regulates the State's liabilities in guaranteeing the right to freedom of belief and religion as follows: The State shall respect and guarantee the right to freedom of belief and religion of everyone; shall secure that all religions are equal before the law. The State shall respect and protect the good cultural and moral values of beliefs and religions, the tradition of worship of ancestors, the glorification of persons who



have rendered meritorious services to the country and/or communities, meeting the spiritual needs of people. The State shall guarantee belief-related establishments and religious establishments and lawful assets of belief-related establishments and religious establishments.

***– Obligations of organizations and individuals in the implementation of the right to freedom of belief and freedom***

Along with the rights mentioned above, the Law on Belief and Religion outlines the obligations of organizations and individuals in implementing the right to freedom of religion and belief, which include: Organizations, individuals conducting belief-related and religious activities shall have to observe the Constitution, the Law on Belief and Religion and other provisions of relevant laws; religious dignitaries, officials, religious practitioners and representatives, management boards of belief-related establishments shall have the responsibility to instruct religious followers and participants in belief-related and religious activities to carry out belief-related and religious activities in compliance with the provisions of law.

***– Strictly forbidden acts***

Pursuant to Article 14 of the 2013 Constitution, the Law on Belief and Religion stipulates certain groups of prohibited acts including discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief; coercing, bribing or preempting other

people to follow or not follow a belief or religion; offending beliefs and religions and religious activities. Such belief-related activities and religious activities are prohibited including those which infringe upon national security and defense, national sovereignty, social order and safety, the environment; those which encroach upon social morality; infringe upon a person's body, health, life, property; those which offend honor and dignity of others; those which obstruct the exercise of civic rights and obligations; those which sow division among ethnic groups, among religions, between followers and non-followers of beliefs and religions, among people who follow different beliefs and religions; and those which take advantage of belief and religious activities for rent-seeking.

***– Conditions for registration of collective religious practices***

To ensure the right to freedom of belief and religion of all individuals are in accordance with the 2013 Constitution, the Law on Belief and Religion regulates the registration of collective religious practices for followers of religious organizations in places which are not eligible for the setting-up of subordinate religious organizations; for members of religious organizations that have been granted registration certificates for religious activities; and specifically for those who follow a religion but do not have a recognized and registered religious organization or recognized religious organizations.

To be registered for collective religious activities, a group of followers of a religious organization or an organization licensed for religious activities must satisfy the following conditions: having a lawful location for religious activities and a representative. Such a representative must be a Vietnamese citizen permanently residing in Vietnam, having full civil act capacity; not serving administrative sanctions in the field of belief and religion; having no criminal record or not being charged under the provisions of the legislation on criminal procedures. At the same time, the content of proposed religious practices does not fall into the category of forbidden acts prescribed by the Law on Belief and Religion.

For groups of people who follow a religion yet do not have an organization, in addition to meeting the requirements for followers of religious organizations and organizations licensed for religious activities, the following conditions must also be met: having religious dogmas, canon laws; the name of the group of people engaged in collective religious practices shall not be identical to that of any religious organization, organization licensed for religious activities, political organization, socio-political organization, or of any celebrity or national hero.

***- Conditions for licensing religious activities***

The Law on Belief and Religion stipulates that an organization shall be granted a registration certificate

for religious activities when fully satisfying the following conditions: having religious dogmas, canon law, and religious rites; having goals, objectives and operational regulations which are not contrary to the provisions of law; the name of the organization shall not be identical to that of any religious organization or organization licensed for religious activities, political organization, socio-political organization, or of any celebrity or national hero; the representative or leader of the organization shall be a Vietnamese citizen who resides in Vietnam, has full civil act capacity; does not serve administrative sanctions in the field of belief and religion; has no criminal record, or is not a person being charged under the provisions of the legislation on criminal procedures; having a lawful location for its head office; the contents of religious practices does not belong to those acts prohibited by the Law on Belief and Religion.

The organization with registration certificate for religious activities shall be entitled to conduct the following activities: organizing religious ceremonies, carrying out religious practices, preaching and fostering religious dogmas; appointing, electing, nominating officials; repairing, renovating the head office; participating in humanitarian and charity activities; and organizing congresses through the Charter.

***– Conditions for recognizing a religious organization, its legal entity and subordinate religious organizations***

The Law on Belief and Religion stipulates that one of the prerequisites for an organization to be recognized as a religious organization is as follows: such an organization must have conducted religious activities on a stable and continuous basis for at least five years commencing from the date of receiving the registration certificate for its religious activities. This is the new content of the Law on Belief and Religion. (Previously, the Ordinance on Belief and Religion and enforcement-guiding documents specified 23 years of stable and continuous operation of a religious organization as of the date of approval for its collective religious practices as a condition for official recognition of its status).

In addition, the organization must also meet other requirements, such as: having its Charter as stipulated in the Law on Belief and Religion; the representative, leader of the organization shall be a Vietnamese citizen who resides in Vietnam, has full civil act capacity, does not serve administrative sanctions in the field of belief and religion, has no criminal record, and is not a person being charged under the provisions of the legislation on criminal procedures; having an organizational structure in accordance with its Charter; having assets which are independent of those owned by other organizations and individuals, and taking responsibility for its own assets; and participating in legal relations independently in its name.

The Law on Belief and Religion for the first time certifies religious organizations as non-commercial legal entities: *A religious organization shall be a non-commercial legal entity commencing from the date of recognition as a religious organization by the competent State authority* (Article 30). This is a new and important content of the Law aimed at clearly defining the legal status of religious organizations and subordinate religious organizations, ensuring their rights and obligations when participating in legal relations. This regulation is in line with the management in a law-ruled State, international law as well as the practical activities of current religious organizations and subordinate religious organizations.

After being recognized, religious organizations may conduct conferment, appointment, election, transfer, removing, and relieving of religious dignitaries, officials and practitioners from their office; setting up religious training establishments, opening religious refresher courses, etc.

***- Regulations on religious practices of foreigners lawfully residing in Vietnam***

The State of Vietnam respects and guarantees the freedom of belief and religion of foreigners lawfully residing in Vietnam. The Law on Belief and Religion stipulates that foreigners lawfully residing in Vietnam have the right to: carry out religious practices, participate

in belief and religious activities; use lawful locations for collective religious activities; invite Vietnamese religious dignitaries, officials and practitioners to perform religious rites and preach; invite foreign religious dignitaries and practitioners to preach; take vows at religious establishments; study at religious training establishments or attend refresher courses on religion of a religious organization in Vietnam; bring religious publications and religious articles to serve the need of religious practices as regulated by the Vietnamese law. Foreign religious dignitaries and practitioners who are lawfully residing in Vietnam may preach at religious establishments or other lawful locations in Vietnam.

On the basis of the above principled provisions, the Law on Belief and Religion has a new point of creating favorable conditions for groups of foreigners lawfully residing in Vietnam to have the opportunity to rent or borrow facilities to engage in religious practices. Foreigners may also be ordained or nominated by a Vietnamese religious organization, etc.

***- Regulations on religious activities, publishing, education, medical, socio-sponsoring, charitable and humanitarian activities of religious organizations***

One of the new provisions in the Law on Belief and Religion compared to the previous regulations is the notification of the annual list of religious activities to

be carried out by religious organizations, subordinate religious organizations, and licensed organizations, which only needs to be performed once. For religious activities not on the announced list, an additional notice shall be made. This is a new and progressive regulation in line with the current trend of administrative reform in Vietnam.

The Law on Belief and Religion regulates: religious organizations and subordinate religious organizations shall carry out international activities in accordance with the Charter of the religious organizations themselves in compliance with Vietnamese law; they must comply with Vietnamese laws and relevant national laws when conducting international relations; they may invite foreign organizations and individuals to Vietnam to carry out religious activities and international relations on religion; they can appoint religious dignitaries and officials, religious practitioners and followers to participate in religious activities and provide religious training abroad; they may join a foreign religious organization.

The Law on Belief and Religion stipulates that religious organizations shall be entitled to publish scriptures, books, and other publications related to beliefs and religions; production, exportation, importation of cultural products related to beliefs and religions, religious articles; they shall be entitled to take part in educational, medical, socio-sponsoring, charitable, humanitarian activities in accordance with the provisions of the relevant laws.



Decree 162 stipulates that religious organizations and subordinate religious organizations may receive financial aids from foreign organizations and individuals to serve the provision of training in religion for religious practitioners, reparation, innovation, upgradation and construction of religious establishments, organization of religious ceremonies, publishing and importing of religious texts, purchasing religious equipment. Such aids must comply with Government regulations on managing and using nonrefundable aids.

***- Handling of violations of the law in the field of belief and religion.***

In order to ensure the effective implementation of the Law on Belief and Religion, and at the same time ensure the right of organizations and individuals to report, petition, complain and denounce on the activities of state agencies in the field of belief and religion, the Law on Belief and Religion provides for specialized inspection on religion; complaints, denunciations, lawsuits; handling violations in the field of belief and religion. In particular, when organizations and individuals commit acts of violating the legislation on belief and religion or taking advantage of beliefs and religions to violate the law, depending on the nature and seriousness of their violations, they shall be subject to administrative sanctions or investigation for penal liability, and forcible compensation for the damages, if any, as stipulated by law.

Officials and civil servants who violate the belief-related and religious legislation during performance of public duties shall, depending on the nature and seriousness of their violations, be subject to discipline, or investigation for penal liability as stipulated by law for the following violations: abusing positions, power to carry out acts which are contrary to the provisions of the Law on Belief and Religion and relevant laws; showing the lack of responsibility which causes the violation of the belief-related and religious legislation; violating the regulations on proceedings and administrative procedures in State management over belief-related and religious activities.

Thus, along with the development of its socio-economic life, expanded exchange, international integration and participation in many organizations and forums around the world, Vietnam has actively internalized the provisions of the international treaties to which Vietnam is a member, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In Vietnam, over the years, the right to freedom of belief and religion has always been recognized and protected by the State in a progressive and positive direction. The continuous improvement of the policies and laws on belief and religion shows the liabilities of the State in leading and managing society, caring for and appreciating the beliefs and religions of citizens, guaranteeing people's right to freedom of belief and religion and affirming that religious compatriots are an important part of the great national unity bloc.

**CHAPTER III**

**ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES  
AND PRIORITIES OF VIETNAM IN  
GUARANTEEING THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM  
OF BELIEF AND RELIGION**

**1. Achievements in guaranteeing the right to freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam**

*1.1. The State always attaches great importance to building and perfecting the legal framework, creating a legal basis to protect the right to freedom of belief and religion.*

As a member state of important international conventions, Vietnam is committed to respecting and guaranteeing to its people the rights recognized by the conventions, and through legislative action to effectively implement those rights.

The State defines belief and religion as the legitimate spiritual needs of a part of the people and recognizes that religious compatriots are an important part of the great

national unity bloc. The State consistently implements the policy of respecting and ensuring people's right to freedom of belief and religion, to follow any religion or to follow no religion. Therefore, the construction, improvement and renewal of the policies and laws on belief and religion are paid great attention by the State of Vietnam.

In the course of history, the legal system on belief and religion has been continuously developed and improved, creating a legal basis for the protection, guarantee and promotion of the right to freedom of belief and religion; legal documents regulating the field of belief and religion have not only increased rapidly in number but also become more various in form. Their content is constantly amended, supplemented and perfected to keep up with reality. The right to freedom of belief and religion has always been recognized and affirmed in the Constitutions of Vietnam since the founding of the country (Constitutions of Vietnam in 1946, 1959, 1980, 1992, and 2013). Through five times of building and amending the Constitution, the right to freedom of belief and religion has been increasingly expressed clearly, thoroughly, and perfectly in both width and depth, secured by numerous mechanisms and methods to operate more effectively.

On the basis of Resolution No. 25/NQ-TW on religious affairs, the National Assembly and the Government of Vietnam have institutionalized legal provisions and plans,

solutions, and mechanisms to ensure the implementation, creating a legal foundation for demonstrating that citizens perform their fundamental rights to freedom of belief and religion; such legal instruments include the Ordinance on Belief and Religion; Decree No. 22/2005/NĐ-CP, dated 1 March 2005 of the Government guiding the implementation of a number of articles of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion; Directive No. 01/2005/CT-TTg dated 4 February 2005 of the Prime Minister on some work towards Protestantism; Directive No. 1940/CT-TTg, dated 31 December 2008 of the Prime Minister on houses and land related to religions; Decree No. 92/2012/NĐ-CP dated 8 November 2012 of the Government detailing and implementing measures to enforce the Ordinance on Belief and Religion.

In order to concretize the stipulations of the 2013 Constitution and, at the same time, overcome the deficiencies of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion exposed after more than 10 years of implementation, on 18 November 2016, the 14th National Assembly approved the Law on Belief and Religion at its second session, which came into effect from 1 January 2018. This is a legal document that directly regulates the field of belief and religion, and is also one of the first legal documents to have been enforced to materialize the 2013 Constitution's stipulations on a human right—it is everyone's right to freedom of belief and religion. The Law on Belief and

Religion has many innovative and progressive aspects, demonstrating openness, transparency and the law-ruled State, in accordance with the spirit of the 2013 Constitution, ensuring compatibility with the international treaties to which Vietnam has signed. The Law on Belief and Religion not only has overcome the deficiencies and shortcomings of the previous Ordinance on Belief and Religion, but also conforms to Vietnam's current institutional reform and administrative procedure simplification policies, establishing a legal framework that is both tight and flexible, effectively serving the requirements of Vietnam's international integration, ensuring the interests of the country and all the people.

With the efforts of the Party and State, Vietnam's legal system on the right to freedom of belief and religion has been rapidly improved. The achievements in formulating and perfecting the law on the right to freedom of belief and religion have met the practical requirements of the country's development; setting an important legal foundation for everyone to have opportunities and favorable conditions to enjoy the right to freedom of belief and religion. With the comprehensive and forward-thinking provisions of the Law on Belief and Religion on everyone's right to freedom of belief and religion, belief-related activities are preserved and promoted, while religious activities are maintained and developed to meet the spiritual need of the people, and they continue

to play a significant role in national construction and development.

*1.2. Mobilizing the participation of the whole political system in the process of ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion*

In ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion, Vietnam always attaches great importance to, and brings into play the role of the political system. Accordingly, the State manages belief and religious affairs according to the provisions of the Constitution and laws. The State has the responsibility to respect and protect everyone's right to freedom of belief and religion; ensure that all religions are treated equal before the law; respect and protect the cultural values and good ethics of beliefs, religions, ancestral worship traditions, honor people with meritorious services to the country and the community to meet the spiritual needs of people. The State protects religious institutions, belief institutions and the legitimate assets of belief establishments and religious organizations.

The Vietnamese Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations are responsible for rallying compatriots who follow beliefs or religions and people who do not, in order to build great national unity, construct and defend the Fatherland; promptly presenting people's opinions, aspirations and recommendations on issues related to belief and religion to competent State agencies; participating in

the formulation of legal documents on belief and religion; social criticism of draft legal documents, master plans and specific plans, programs and projects on socio-economic development of the State, which are related to belief and religion, in accordance with the provisions of law; engaging in communication with, and mobilizing religious dignitaries, officials and practitioners, adherents and followers of beliefs and religions, religious organizations and people to observe the law on belief and religion; supervising the activities of agencies, organizations, elected representatives and cadres, civil servants in the implementation of the policies and laws on belief and religion.

Through projects, cooperation programs and activities of the National Assembly and the Government, ministries, departments, sectors, diplomatic agencies, judiciary, police, press, socio-political organizations, etc., have communicated and educated extensively on the right to freedom of belief and religion, contributing to raise the awareness of belief and religion for leaders, managers, law-enforcement officers, religious organizations, religious dignitaries, religious practitioners, followers, and people.

*1.3. The communication, dissemination and education of the law on the right to freedom of belief and religion are always in the concern of the State*

Vietnam always advocates that the communication, dissemination and education of the right to freedom



of belief and religion is one of the effective measures to protect this right itself. In the last years, the work of communicating, disseminating and educating the law on belief and religion, as well as bringing it into practice, has always been concerned and implemented synchronously from central to grassroots levels by administrative authorities and sectors, focusing especially on innovation in the content with a variety of forms, such as compiling and publishing popular documents, offering legal education on beliefs and religions; organizing law dissemination conferences for cadres performing religious work in the political system and religious dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers; coordinating in the production of films and thematic reportages to be broadcast on the National Television Station to inform international friends and overseas Vietnamese about the Party's guideline, the State's policies and laws which consistently respect and guarantee the right to freedom of belief and religion of all people; contributing to raising awareness and sense of law observance of people of all religions; strengthening the trust of religious dignitaries and followers in the State. Since the implementation of the Law on Belief and Religion, the Ministry of Home Affairs (directly, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs) has held 152 conferences to communicate and disseminate the laws related to belief and religion to civil servants, with 27,078 participants; 144 conferences for religious dignitaries, officials and followers,

with a total of 20,215 attendees. In provinces and cities, 13,882 conferences on law dissemination related to beliefs and religions were held with a total of 982,991 attendees.

Additionally, the communication and dissemination of the law on belief and religion is also carried out in a variety of ways, including through the *Journal of Religious Affairs*, website and published works of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, magazines and the web portal of the Ministry of Home Affairs; through competitions to learn about the laws and policies on belief and religion; through seminars and talks; and by meeting and contacting religious dignitaries, officials and practitioners, and religious organizations, etc., to inform organizations, individuals and the public to make them properly understand the guidelines, policies and laws of Vietnam.

Through such efforts as said above, cadres and people gradually got to comprehend the specific legal provisions pertaining to their legitimate rights and interests, as well as their roles and responsibilities for the implementation of national human rights obligations. The communication and dissemination of the Party's guidelines and the State's policies and laws on belief and religion not only raise awareness of the law of officers, religious officials, dignitaries and followers, and enable them proactively implement it, but also contribute to doing well the work of

external information on religion, making the international community and the large overseas Vietnamese communities understand properly the views of the Party, policies and laws of the State, and the achievements of Vietnam in ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion. These efforts contribute effectively to the fight against slanderous charge that Vietnam violates democracy, human rights, and represses ethnic groups and religions.

*1.4. Vietnam actively promotes international cooperation and integration in the protection and enforcement of the right to freedom of belief and religion.*

As an active and responsible member of the international community, Vietnam has proactively signed and ratified the majority of international conventions, protocols, and participated international dialogues related to human rights, including the right to freedom of belief and religion. Vietnam is a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2014-2016 term, and is about to undertake the position of a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2023-2025 term. In addition, Vietnam has made numerous active contributions to the establishment and operation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) etc. Vietnam seriously strives to fulfill its responsibilities, obligations and international commitments by materializing international norms on

human rights in its legal system, policy and practice; by building and completing a system of domestic laws and policies in accordance and compliance with the provisions of the International Convention on Human Rights to which Vietnam is a signatory; and by willing to engage in dialogues and resolutely fighting to protect human rights, including the right to freedom of belief and religion.

Vietnam actively engages itself in dialogues with its US and EU partners on democracy, human rights, and religion. It has also successfully defended its country report under the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), presented its national report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to the UN Human Rights Council, and participated in multilateral forums on human rights and religion within the framework of the United Nations, ASEAN, ASEM, etc. Additionally, Vietnam always proactively provides information on achievements in guaranteeing freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam to the government, scholars, the press and people of other countries; welcomes delegations of parliamentarians and government officials from other countries to visit Vietnam in order to learn about the situation of ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion; sets up working delegations to the United States and some Western countries to directly engage with them on issues related to ensuring freedom of belief and religion.

In order to exchange information, establish dialogue mechanisms, assist friends from other nations in comprehending and developing a dialogue system, and support itself in the international arena, Vietnam also expands its cooperation and dialogue relations with nations in the region and around the world in the field of beliefs and religions. Since 2011, there have been nearly 70 delegations to visit other countries and study about their religions: the examination of Catholicism in Mexico, Cuba, and Russia; factual studies of Protestantism in Korea and the United States; examination of the belief and religious life of the Vietnamese communities in France, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Germany; research on Islam and Islamic culture in Egypt, Iran, Israel, and Turkey; seeking cooperation opportunities to export Halal goods of Vietnam to Muslim countries; building relationships in the field of religion with most countries in the ASEAN region, etc. The relations between Vietnam and the Vatican are making positive progress. Vietnamese State leaders have made a number of visits to the Vatican and met with the Pope. Up to now, the two parties have agreed to strengthen their relationship in the direction towards a higher level—to accredit a resident Special Envoy of the Pope to Vietnam. The strengthening of international dialogue and cooperation has contributed to clarifying the policies and achievements of Vietnam in the field of belief and religion, enhancing its image in the international arena.

*1.5. The State gives consideration to, and has effectively implemented the organization of law enforcement to ensure the right to freedom of belief and religion.*

The State management agencies in charge of belief and religion at all levels have proactively guided and brought belief and religion activities into order, stability and compliance with the law on the basis of Party directives and policies, and State legislation. They also direct religious organizations to organize conferences and congresses strictly in accordance with the latter's Charters, Rules, and the provisions of law. They concentrate on addressing the petitions and legitimate needs of religious organizations and individuals, including matters in relation to land and construction, etc.; encouraging religious organizations to take part in social, charitable, and humanitarian activities, helping difficulty-stricken people in remote and isolated areas; actively responding to patriotic emulation movements for the community, and contributing to national construction and defense.

The effort to address the legitimate demands of religious organizations and individuals has brought many clear results, creating consensus among dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers of religions. Ecclesiastical organizations at all levels of religions actively guide their followers to live a "good religious and secular life", abiding well the State's policies and laws, preserving national

solidarity; relationships between religious organizations and authorities at all levels have been strengthened.

The Government, the Prime Minister, ministries, ministerial-level agencies and local authorities at all levels regularly organize, guide and inspect the implementation of the law; promptly prevent and handle violations of the right to freedom of belief and religion. The State always attaches great importance to integrating freedom of belief and religion into the process of formulating, organizing and implementing development programs and policies; focusing on promoting economic growth in harmony with cultural development; and realizing social progress and justice.

The achievements in law enforcement to ensure freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam are recognized and appreciated by the United Nations and many countries around the world. This is convincing, undeniable proof of Vietnam's efforts in formulating, perfecting and enforcing the law on the right to freedom of belief and religion, while also rejecting incomplete or incorrect information about the situation of freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam, which is disseminated by the elements lacking of goodwill.

*1.6. The right to freedom of belief and religion is practically guaranteed.*

In addition to formulating and perfecting the legal system regulating belief and religion, over the years,

Vietnam has gained great achievements, which are of great significance in ensuring the people's right to freedom of belief and religion in practice. These are reflected in the following areas:

*First, religious diversity, harmony, and equality are respected.*

Vietnam is a country with many beliefs and religions, yet none of them has ever been dominant in national history. Religions coexist intermingled with each other, actively take part in the construction of the country and make many contributions to the national community.

All religious organizations in Vietnam are treated equally before the law, have the right to conduct religious activities within the framework of the law and are equally protected by law. No religious organization or individual acting in accordance with the law is prohibited. Everyone is completely free to choose to follow or not to follow a belief or religion without being forced, bribed or hindered. Believers and followers of religions are allowed to practice their faith in their homes, places of worship or at a group meeting registered with the government.

In Vietnam, religions live together in national harmony and solidarity. There are no religious or ethnic conflicts. Dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers of religions actively participate in social movements, charitable work, and poverty alleviation, while also making practical contributions to national development.



*Second, religious organizations are allowed to operate in accordance with their Charters, regulations and provisions of the law.*

The State ensures and creates conditions for religious life and religious activities of religious organizations to take place normally. Significant religious holidays such as the Buddha's birthday and Vu Lan Festival (Wandering Soul's Day) of Buddhism, Christmas and Easter of Catholics and Protestants, Yen Dieu Tri Cung Festival (Holy Banquet for the Great Mother and Nine Goddesses) and the celebration of the initiation of Cao Dai religion, the Kate festival of Cham people, and the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan are held on a large scale, drawing a large number of followers. Many religious holidays have become public holidays.

The recognition of religious organizations and the granting of registration certificates for religious activities are performed in accordance with the legislation. After the coming into force of the Law on Belief and Religion, the competent state agencies have recognized one religious organization (Vietnam Pentecostal Gospel Church), and given registration certificates for religious activity to three other groups (Vietnam Full Gospel Church; Vietnam Missionary Union Evangelical Church; Vietnam Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

The registration of religious activities is facilitated across the country. Before the Law on Belief and Religion

came into effect, there had been more than 2,600 group points approved to register for concentrated religious activities; after it took effect, more than 1,100 group points were permitted to do so.

Religious organizations in Vietnam take the initiative in consolidating their organization, ordination, appointment, election, nomination and transfer of dignitaries, officials, and practitioners in accordance with their Charters, regulations, and provisions of the law. In order to better meet the spiritual needs of the people, the number of religious dignitaries, officials and practitioners, and professional religious activists has been growing year by year. More than 6,500 persons have been ordained and nominated as dignitaries since the Law on Belief and Religion was implemented, and 16,783 people have been appointed, elected, and nominated to work as officials.

The State ensures and creates conditions for religious organizations to establish religious training institutions and hold training courses on religion. Currently, many religious organizations have a system of religious training institutions; the number of annual enrollment is stable. Teaching activities at religious training institutions are carried out according to the provisions of religious organizations and the law. All over the country, there are 62 religious training institutions found in 36 provinces and cities. Particularly for the Catholic Church of Vietnam,

since the Law on Belief and Religion took effect, there have been two religious training institutions established: Thai Binh Sacred Heart Seminary (Thai Binh) and Campus II Saint Joseph Xuan Loc Seminary in Da Lat (Lam Dong). Some religious training institutions are allowed to train Master's and PhD students. Training types are more flexible and diverse; forms of short-term training options have been enhanced; religious dignitaries may be trained both inside and outside Vietnam. Thereby, it demonstrates that religious dignitaries and officials in Vietnam can receive better training, and as a result, their qualifications are improving, which boosts their prestige and influence on the mass of believers, in both religious life and social life. Over three years of implementation of the Law on Belief and Religion, affiliated religious organizations have opened 477 refresher courses for those who specialize in religious activities and 230 courses for those who do not specialize in religious activities. The Government Committee for Religious Affairs has drafted and published two lecture volumes on Vietnamese History and Vietnamese Law and handed them down to religious training institutions for teaching.

Favorable conditions are created for religious organizations in publishing scriptures and other publications on beliefs and religions; in production, export and import of cultural products related to beliefs and religions, and religious articles to meet the requirements of religions.

According to statistics, from 2018 to 2021, the Religious Publishing House was allowed to issue 2,027 publications, with print runs of 7,006,240 copies, many of which have been translated into English, French and ethnic languages. In Vietnam, there are currently 15 newspapers and magazines under different religious organizations, including *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, *Enlightenment* newspaper (Buddhism); *Catholicism and the Nation* newspaper (Catholicism); *Pastoral News* (Protestantism), etc. The majority of religious organizations have their own websites to support their religious activities and propagation.

In accordance with the law, religious dignitaries, officials and practitioners are entitled to engage themselves in the management of the State and society, and to run for election to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels like any other citizen. The 15th National Assembly has five delegates who are religious dignitaries and practitioners, including four Buddhists and one Catholic. According to the statistics from provinces and cities, there are currently more than 10,000 religious dignitaries, practitioners and followers who are serving as deputies of the People's Councils at all levels for the 2021-2026 term.

*Third, religious organizations and individuals are permitted to participate in international relations activities.*

The State creates conditions for religious organizations, dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers to carry

out international exchange and cooperation activities. Since 2011, there have been about 2,000 turns of religious individuals leaving the country to attend training courses abroad, international conferences and seminars related to religion, etc.; nearly 500 foreign delegations with more than 3,000 people have entered Vietnam for religious exchange and guidance at religious establishments or for participation in the religious events held by Vietnamese religious organizations, etc.

In addition to international activities or exchanges with international religious organizations, religious organizations in Vietnam also actively participate in regional and international religious conferences and forums, for example, attending the Asia-Europe Meeting (five times), or attending the Asia-Pacific Interfaith Dialogue (six times), etc. Many significant international religious events have been held successfully in Vietnam and much appreciated by international public opinion, such as the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (2012) with the participation of 122 delegates including cardinals, archbishops, bishops and delegates from the Episcopal Conferences of Asian countries, several continents and representatives of the Vatican; the United Nations' Buddhist Vesak Day (2019) with the participation of 3,000 delegates, including 1,650 international guests from 112 countries and territories, 250 overseas Vietnamese people, who are monks and nuns, from 40 countries, and about

20,000 Buddhist monks, nuns and adherents. The World General Assembly of Order of Preachers was held in Xuan Loc, Dong Nai (2019) with the participation of 142 delegates including superiors general, provincial superiors and provincial representative in the world. This is the first time that a major international religious order ever held a General Chapter in Vietnam, etc. Supporting and creating conditions for religious organizations to successfully organize international religious events not only affirms the right guidelines, policies and laws of Vietnam but also contributes to promoting the image of a Vietnam capable to host international religious events, and to be an attractive destination in both investment and spiritual tourism.

*Fourth, the right to use scriptures and express beliefs and religions of people who are being managed or detained is paid attention to.*

At detention centers, prisons, the functional agencies always create conditions for the people who are being managed or detained to utilize scriptures and express their beliefs and religions in accordance with the law; organize communication and education to help prisoners and people in custody or temporary detention understand the provisions of law on the right to freedom of belief and religion; create favorable conditions for prisoners and people in custody or temporary detention to use and study scriptures, books, newspapers and publications on beliefs

and religions at libraries; allow prisoners and people in custody or temporary detention to perform a variety of religious rituals (such as “signing” before meals, and praying in the evening or in the morning), which should not cause troubles to others.

Currently, 17 books related to religion, with 4,418 copies, are found at the libraries of 54 prisons. The introduction of scriptures into prisons contributes to the enforcement of the law on the right to belief and religion of people, as well as their access to religious books and publications. This demonstrates Vietnam’s consistent policy in ensuring freedom of belief and religion as well as its efforts in implementing international conventions on civil, political and human rights.

*Fifth, religious organizations and individuals are encouraged and assisted to participate in social security.*

In the last years, religious organizations have actively participated in patriotic emulation drives, contributing both human and material resources to national construction. Religious organizations actively take part in educational, training, medical, social protection, charity and humanitarian activities:

*On education:* The educational institutions established by religious organizations and individuals mainly participate in preschool education and vocational training. Currently, the country has about 300 preschools, 2,000

compassion classes, and 12 vocational training institutions. The fact that religious organizations and individuals are encouraged to participate in education contributes to improving the quality of human resources for society.

*On health and community health care:* Currently, the country has about 500 charitable medical examination and treatment establishments under religious organizations, established in various forms, such as Tue Tinh Duong (traditional medicine clinics), dispensaries, Phuoc Thien Southern Medicinal Herbs pharmacy, polyclinics, and Eastern and Western medical clinics. They provide medical examination and treatment for thousands of patients with an annual spending of hundreds of billions of Vietnamese *dong*, contributing to health care for people, especially those in difficult circumstances, as well as easing the burden on the State.

*On social protection, charity and humanitarian work:* Statistics released in 2021 show that there are nearly 800 social protection institutions of Buddhist, Catholic, Cao Dai organizations and others across Vietnam. They take care of over 12,000 orphans, disabled people, lonely elderly people, mental patients, and HIV/AIDS patients. They also make a significant contribution to the work of ensuring social security in localities.

Religious organizations actively contributed resources and joined hands with the government at various levels



in the prevention of the Covid-19 epidemic: many volunteers—who are religious dignitaries, practitioners and followers participated in the fight against the Covid-19 epidemic at the front lines; many religious facilities were used for social distancing and treatment of patients infected with Covid-19; religious organizations had encouraged religious dignitaries, officials and followers to donate tens of billions of Vietnamese *dong* to the Covid-19 Vaccine Fund at central and local levels, and to supply money and essential equipment to the epidemic-stricken areas.

The Vietnamese Prime Minister met with representatives of religious organizations three times (in 2016, 2019 and 2022) to applaud their contributions to the cause of national construction and defense. At the meetings, religious representatives expressed their support for the Party and State and wished to contribute to socio-economic development, and to maintaining national independence and territorial sovereignty. One religious representatives said, “There are many religious altars, but there is only one altar to the Fatherland.” This statement affirmed the unity and consensus of religions in the cause of national construction.

*Sixth, attention is paid to dealing with the land issue related to religions.*

Based on the needs of religious organizations, the local land funds and according to the provisions of the

law, local governments always create favorable conditions for land allocation for religious establishments and organizations. According to the current provisions of the Land Law, lands allocated by the State for religious purposes are not subject to the land use tax. The local governments have so far provided religious organizations with hundreds of hectares of land to use for religious operation, meeting the people's needs for religious activities.

The granting of certificates of land use rights, ownership of properties and other land-attached assets for religious establishments in recent years has been in the focus of attention of the authorities of provinces and cities, with positive results. Up to the present, the number of religious establishments which have been granted certificates of land use rights, accounts for more than 70% of the total.

The State creates favorable conditions for religious organizations to repair, renovate or build anew religious establishments. Until now, most of the religious places of worship have been repaired and upgraded, and many new places of worship have been built. According to government statistics, 225 new places of worship were built in 2021. The provisions of the laws on construction must be complied with during the renovation, upgrading, and new building of belief and religious structures.

*Seventh, freedom of belief and religion for ethnic minorities is guaranteed.*

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country where 54 different ethnic groups co-live. There are 53 ethnic minorities, totaling around 14 million people, or about 14.3% of the total population. Ethnic minorities are an integral part of the great national unity bloc. According to the data from the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, currently, about 2.8 million ethnic minority people follow religions (accounting for about 20% of the ethnic minority population). Over the years, the local governments in ethnic minority and mountainous areas have consistently paid attention to, and carried out a policy that respects and upholds the right of ethnic minorities to freedom of belief and religion. They also pay attention to creating conducive conditions for religious organizations to operate in accordance with the law. The material and spiritual life of religious compatriots is taken care of; legitimate needs for beliefs and religions are concerned and guided by the authorities at all levels; cultural and belief activities and festivals of ethnic minorities have been paid attention to, restored and promoted strongly: the Cham ethnic group, which practices Islam and Brahmanism, has established a community representative board to support religious activities; the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has built the Khmer Theravada Buddhist Academy to meet the needs of training Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks; scriptures

of religious organizations have been published in 13 ethnic languages; thousands of Protestant groups and branches of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands and Northern mountain provinces have been granted registration certificates for grouped religious activities; religious followers who are ethnic minorities are allowed to participate in international activities, etc. By the end of December 2021, over 3,300 Protestant cluster sites had been registered for grouped religious activities across the country, including 1,647 sites in the Northern mountain provinces, and 1,744 sites in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc provinces.

*Eighth, foreigners who are legally residing in Vietnam are entitled to favorable conditions for religious activities according to the provisions of law.*

In the course of socio-economic development and international integration of Vietnam, and in the trend of globalization, the number of foreigners working in Vietnam is growing (currently over 100,000), and among them, there is a portion of religious followers. Local governments always pay attention to, and created favorable conditions for foreigners to conduct religious activities in accordance with Vietnamese legislation. Foreigners lawfully residing in Vietnam may conduct religious activities together with Vietnamese believers or gather in groups at lawful places for religious activities. Currently, there are 67 sites of

grouped religious activities for foreigners lawfully residing in Vietnam, found chiefly in the following areas: Ho Chi Minh City (41 sites), Hanoi (13 sites), localities with many industrial parks (Hai Duong: 1 site, Da Nang: 2 sites, Binh Duong: 3 sites, Dong Nai: 1 site, and others).

Groups of foreigners engaged in religious activities can invite foreign religious dignitaries and practitioners to come to Vietnam to preach. Since the implementation of the Law on Belief and Religion, there have been more than 125 turns of foreign religious dignitaries entering Vietnam to guide religious activities for groups of foreigners at the sites of grouped religious activities. This is an illustration of how Vietnam respects and ensures the right to freedom of belief and religion for residents, including foreigners who are lawfully residing in this country.

*Ninth, the overseas Vietnamese community is supported in belief and religious activities.*

Currently, the overseas Vietnamese community consists of about 5.3 million people (80% of the overseas Vietnamese community are followers of beliefs and religions). They are living, working and studying in 130 countries and territories. According to the preliminary statistics from Vietnamese religious organizations and overseas Vietnamese representative agencies, at present, there are about 500 Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns, more than one million Vietnamese Buddhists doing

religious activities at over 400 Vietnamese temples in 33 countries and territories; about one million Vietnamese Catholics form 300 communities in 39 countries in Asia, Europe, America, Africa and Oceania; 685 Vietnamese are pastors and evangelists of Protestantism, 530 churches, cluster sites of overseas Vietnamese; about 32,000 overseas Vietnamese are Cao Dai followers belonging to 59 worshipping establishments (mainly in the US), etc.

Vietnam consistently advocates that overseas Vietnamese people are an integral part of the Vietnamese national community, and implements the policy of ensuring everyone's right to freedom of belief and religion (including overseas Vietnamese). The State is constantly interested in supporting religious and belief activities for the overseas Vietnamese community and in creating opportunities for them to participate in religious and belief activities in Vietnam. Every year, Vietnamese authorities dispatch many delegations to Europe and Asia to meet the Vietnamese community to learn about their wishes and aspirations, and require the local authorities to provide help for them in religious and spiritual activities. They also arrange meetings with religious dignitaries and believers – Vietnamese nationals far from home – who may return to Vietnam to celebrate traditional New Year or attend religious events (the United Nations Vesak Day in 2008, 2014 and 2019; the National Congress of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha; religious festivals of Caodaism,

Catholicism, Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association, etc.). This aims to inspire and secure the sympathy and support of the overseas Vietnamese community.

The State provides assistance to Vietnamese religious organizations so they provide a variety of support and guide religious activities for the Vietnamese populations living abroad. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha sends many delegations to visit and give lectures for Buddhists in some European and Asian countries on important holidays (Buddha's birthday or Vu Lan Festival, etc.); it has established 22 overseas Vietnamese Buddhist Associations, selects and appoints qualified Buddhist monks to guide Buddhist followers in religious activities at Vietnamese Buddhist temples abroad, etc. The Catholic Church of Vietnam and Protestant organizations appoint dignitaries to participate in religious activities, attend conferences, seminars, and religious activities with Vietnamese followers abroad. Cao Dai Tay Ninh Church has seven affiliated religious groups abroad; every year, many overseas Cao Dai dignitaries, officials and followers return to their home to attend the Supreme Lord ceremony and Yen Dieu Tri Cung Festival (Holy Banquet for the Great Mother and the Nine Goddesses), etc. The Minh Ly Sect has established two affiliated religious organizations in the United States. The Central Executive Committee of the Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association guides a group of followers abroad to study their scriptures,

doctrines, canon law, or engage in charitable and humanitarian endeavors, etc.

## **2. Challenges in ensuring freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam**

Over the past 35 years, the national renewal endeavor has intensively and extensively changed all aspects of the political, economic, cultural and social life in Vietnam, creating conditions for all people to enjoy more and more fully human rights, including the right to freedom of belief and religion. The successes in recent years in ensuring this right demonstrate the State's ongoing efforts in the process of building a socialist rule-of-law state, where freedom of belief and religion is regarded as one of the fundamental human rights. These efforts have been recognized and appreciated by the international community. However, Vietnam is currently still facing numerous difficulties and challenges in ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion.

*First*, Vietnam is still in the process of perfecting the law-ruled State and carrying out a judicial reform. Although Vietnam's legal framework for belief and religion is gradually being perfected, it is still not synchronized; some areas have not kept up with the changes of life, have not been amended and supplemented, which leads to difficulties in the application and enforcement of the law, particularly at grassroots level. On the other hand,



the geographical conditions and customs and practices of Vietnam are quite diverse and complex. The population of Vietnam is dispersed throughout areas with various languages, educational levels, and living conditions. So, it is a challenge to develop and put into practice specific policies to ensure people's right to freedom of belief and religion.

*Second*, the extent of perception of human rights and freedom of belief and religion is still limited among a part of cadres, civil servants, religious dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers. The implementation of the guideline, policies and laws on belief and religion in some localities is yet to be synchronized. As a consequences, cases of violations of the right to freedom of belief and religion occasionally occur, which restricts and affects people's capability to exercise that right. The inspection and promotion of the implementation of the law on belief and religion is not yet good, leading to the failure in timely discovering and dealing with violations of this law. These factors may be taken as an excuse for evil forces to distort the reality and accuse falsely Vietnam of violation of human rights and religious freedom, in order to cause socio-political instability in this country.

*Third*, the introduction of exogenous religions and foreign cultural values in the process of globalization and integration contributes to enriching Vietnamese cultural

and religious traditions. At the same time, it is also required to preserve Vietnamese cultural identity against the invasion of inappropriate foreign cultural values. The increase in religious propagation thanks to the development of scientific technology as well as the connection and exchange between countries and ethnic groups creates a diversified religious environment in Vietnam. However, the variety of religions may also bring about a number of complicated issues, particularly potential religious conflict if it is not dealt with in a clever way. The emergence of new religious phenomena is becoming more noticed; there are unlawful religious organizations and even extreme religious activities that run against Vietnam's good customs and traditions and thus are detrimental to Vietnamese social life.

*Fourth*, besides the positive factors, religious activities over the past time have also shown certain drawbacks. Vietnamese religions basically operate stably and observe the law, but the situation of religious activities still shows complicated developments, potentially destabilizing factors, for example, internal conflicts in some religious organizations, deviant activities, superstition, profiteering acts, etc. A part of religious dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers still do not fully understand the State's policies and laws on belief and religion; not fully aware of the rights and obligations of religious adherents as well as of citizens, leading to violations of the law on freedom of belief and

religion. Religious activities of the foreigners in Vietnam pose various issues that need to be addressed, concerning sites for religious activities, scriptures, and instructors. Even though religious organizations carry out numerous social welfare activities for the community and make significant contributions to society, these activities are still largely spontaneous and do not fall under any legal stipulations, particularly when defining religion as a social resource.

*Fifth*, in the context of the ongoing fourth industrial revolution, religious activities in cyberspace have become more varied and plentiful. A large amount of related information is transmitted, at a fast speed and in diverse ways that are not limited in terms of space, time as well as the number of participants, etc. Therefore, the exploitation and use of social networks for “religious life” are of tremendous interest to both individuals and religious organizations. Particularly, during the most recent Covid-19 pandemic, in order to comply with the regulations on epidemic prevention and control, many religious organizations changed the format of their religious activities. By organizing religious activities directly online and through websites, communication pages of the Churches, and by online prayers at home, they partly satisfied the religious and belief needs of followers and people. However, there are currently several sorts of dummy religions activity taking place in cyberspace that exploit beliefs and religions in order to distort the

orthodox religious dogmas, propagate bad contents that run against the fine traditions of the Vietnamese nation, or for profiteering, etc. Belief and religious activities in cyberspace today still have the potential to be exploited by evil elements to cause division to the great national unity bloc and challenges to social security and order. This is a newly emerging factor that causes difficulties for the state management of religion; yet we still lack direct regulations and appropriate management measures.

*Sixth*, evil forces purposefully distort the situation of human rights and freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam. Despite the efforts made by the State of Vietnam in respecting, guaranteeing and promoting the people's right to freedom of belief and religion, some organizations and individuals continue to spread fabricated information about the state of religious freedom in Vietnam and falsely accuse the Vietnamese Government of "religious persecution" or "violation of human rights in the field of belief and religion". They may politicize religious activities, consider religion as a method of rallying believers against the Government, make the unreasonable demand that religion be independent from the management of the State and the law, in order to smear Vietnam's reputation internationally, adversely affect public opinion in Vietnam and its international cooperation. This also indirectly causes difficulties for Vietnam in ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion.

### **3. Some priorities for ensuring freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam**

Currently, Vietnam's laws and policies regarding the freedom of religion and belief are relatively complete, and coming up to international legislation on human rights. However, the world is currently undergoing rapid and profound changes that are affecting all facets of social life, including religion, and creating problems that call for reasonable and synchronous solutions in order to ensure that everyone enjoys ever better the right to freedom of belief and religion in practice. So as to further increase the effectiveness of ensuring and realizing the right to freedom of belief and religion in the context of Vietnam's building of a law-rule State and international integration, the State prioritizes the concerted implementation of the following solutions:

*First, further develop and perfect the laws on belief and religion*

The law on belief and religion should be actively reviewed, supplemented and perfected to ensure the synchronization and consistency between domestic law and international treaties to which Vietnam is a party, and to create a favorable legal corridor for belief and religious activities. In addition, it is necessary to amend and supplement a number of provisions in the specialized laws related to belief and religion (according to the law-

making agenda of the National Assembly of Vietnam) to ensure uniformity and consistency in the implementation of policies and laws on belief and religion; and to create favorable conditions to promote religious organizations having strengths and potential to participate in social activities, as well as to contribute resources to national construction and development.

*Second, strengthen communication and education to raise awareness about the right to freedom of belief and religion*

The communication and education directed to provision of legal knowledge and legal stipulations, and to the implementation of the right to freedom of belief and religion should be strengthened to improve the capacity of law-enforcing authorities, to raise the awareness of religious dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers and the masses in order to better ensure everyone's right to freedom of belief and religion. There are various forms of communication and education on freedom of belief and religion, including formal education (schools), mass media use (books, newspapers, radio, television, social networks, etc.) and the organization of refresher or training courses, lectures, workshops, seminars or conferences, etc. At the same time, publications on the achievement of ensuring freedom of belief and religion in Vietnam should be circulated widely. International seminars and

conferences also should be promoted to communicate the policies and laws on belief and religion to political circles and international scholars. Proper understanding of the right to belief and religion as well as the State's guidelines, policies and laws on it is a prerequisite and indispensable for protecting and effectively promoting the right itself.

*Third, continue to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the policies and law on belief and religion in order to ensure the right to freedom of belief and religion in practice*

We should pay attention to guiding and creating conditions for religious organizations to operate in accordance with their Charters, regulations and the law of the State; proactively address the needs for legitimate religious activities of the mass of believers; promptly take in the situation, desires and aspirations of religious organizations and religious communities and have a way to promptly solve arising problems; proactively prevent and resolutely fight against acts of exploiting beliefs and religions to divide and undermine the great national unity bloc. It is necessary to consider and realize the registration of religious activities and recognition of statuses for eligible religious organizations; to guide religious organizations to well hold their annual conferences and term congresses; to pay attention to socio-economic development and improve the material and spiritual well-being of the people,

including the religious masses. It is necessary to mobilize, unite, and assemble religious organizations, dignitaries, practitioners and followers to live a “good religious and secular life” to positively contribute to the country’s growth and development; to ensure better and better the right to freedom of belief and religion of foreigners legally residing in Vietnam.

*Fourth, continue the proactive and active international integration of Vietnam and enhance its standing in the international arena; improve the effectiveness of religious and belief-related dialogue*

It is necessary to promote proactive exchange with other countries in the field of ensuring human rights, freedom of belief and religion, and learn experience from them. In order for the international community to understand and support Vietnam, it is important to advance religious diplomacy, actively participate in regional and international religious forums, and proactively inform the public of the situation of belief and religion in Vietnam. It is also important to strengthen communication to identify plots and schemes used by ill-willed forces to interfere in Vietnam’s internal affairs through exploiting the democracy, human rights and religious freedom issues; increase delegation exchange, sign cooperation agreements in the field of religion with countries in the region and around the world; create



conditions for religious organizations and individuals to take part in people's foreign affairs, organize international religious events in Vietnam, and contribute to the State's foreign affairs; continue to support religious and belief activities of the overseas Vietnamese community, creating conditions for them to participate in these activities at home; orient these activities according to the provisions of law, in accordance with the fine national moral and cultural traditions and practices; promote the active contributions of foreign religious or religion-related non-governmental organizations to assist Vietnam in the transmission of information aimed to promote the visibility of Vietnam and its people to the international community, contribute to improving the right understanding of Vietnam among the circles of foreign politicians, the public, especially foreign partners, and strengthen the friendship between the Vietnamese people and peoples around the world.

*Fifth, further improve the mechanisms, policies and laws relating to belief and religion in order to mobilize and promote the resources of religion in national construction and development*

In order to better mobilize and promote religious resources in national construction and development, particularly in areas where religions have strengths, such as health, education, social protection, vocational training, charity, and humanitarianism, it is necessary to continue

to improve the relevant mechanisms, policies and laws. Appropriate and synchronous mechanisms, policies, and laws will attract religious organizations and individuals to participate in many areas of social life, making the most of the potentials, values and strengths of religious organizations. By doing so, they can actively contribute to the construction and development of the country.

***Sixth, promoting contact and dialogue with religious organizations and individuals to create consensus in society***

It is necessary to create a closeness, sincerity and trust between religious dignitaries and officials and religious masses by strengthening the organization of forums for exchange and dialogue, and activities aimed to meet and directly contact religious organizations, especially their leadership, in order to understand their wishes, aspirations, and recommendations, as well as their legitimate proposals. At the same time, it is necessary to pay close attention to considering and solving the needs, aspirations, recommendations, and proposals of religious organizations and individuals in accordance with the related policies and laws, contributing to creating consensus in implementing the latter and enhancing the effectiveness of state management of belief and religion.

## **FOR CONCLUSION**

Vietnam is a country having various beliefs and religions with many followers. In the course of national renewal, the belief and religious life in Vietnam has been showing numerous positive changes such as the coming-back of religious beliefs, the increase in the number of religious dignitaries, officials, practitioners and followers; many belief and religious activities may take place on a large scale, drawing a large number of followers and people to attend. The recognized religious organizations carry out religious practices in accordance with Vietnamese traditional culture and attached to the nation. Belief and religious activities meet the spiritual needs of the masses.

The changes in the belief and religious life testify to the sound guidelines and policies of the Party and State of Vietnam towards religion, making the religious community more confident in the Party and State, and in the cause of national renewal. They increasingly support and actively take part in this cause conducive to national thriving.

Since the implementation of Doi Moi (national renewal), Vietnam has achieved important successes in ensuring and promoting human rights in general. Particularly, remarkable progress has been done in the right to freedom of belief and religion. Along with its achievements, Vietnam is also facing a number of difficulties and challenges in guaranteeing this right. With this in mind, the State continuously researches, supplements and gradually perfects the system of legal documents on belief and religion in accordance with the international treaties to which Vietnam is a member. The goal is to better ensure that everyone's right to freedom of belief and religion is upheld.

On the basis of the accomplishments done in recent years and acknowledged by domestic people and international friends, in the spirit of open dialogue, effective bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other countries, international organizations in the field of human rights and religion, Vietnam—as a socialist law-ruled State—will continue to be determined to achieve the goal of increasingly securing, protecting, and promoting the people's fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of belief and religion.

# APPENDIX 1

## Vietnam's religions and religious life through pictures



Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính meeting with representatives of the religious organizations contributing to national construction and development (August 2022).

*Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs*



Deputy Prime Minister Truong Hoa Binh visiting the Vatican City (October 2018).

*Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs*



The United Nations Vesak Day held in Vietnam in 2019.

*Source: Vietnam Buddhist Sangha*



Celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.  
*Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs*



Duc Chi Ton (Supreme Lord) ceremony at the Holy See  
of Caodaism in Tay Ninh.  
*Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs*





Prayers in the month of Ramadan.  
*Source: Can Tho Newsonline*



The 5th Congress of Hoa Hao Buddhist devotees  
(term: 2019-2024)  
*Source: Hoa Hao Buddhist Church*





Religious activities at R'Chai Seventh-Day Adventist Church of the Chil ethnic group, Duc Trong district, Lam Dong province.  
*Source: Seventh-day Adventist Church of Vietnam*



Kate festival of the Cham people adhering to Brahmanism in Binh Thuan province.  
*Source: Mountain and Ethnic Newspaper*



The 3rd Congress of Minh Su Faith (Way of the Enlightened) (term: 2018-2023).

Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs



The Tu An Hieu Nghia (Four Debts of Gratitude) Buddhist Association's third congress (term: 2020-2025).

Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs



Phuoc Thien Southern Medicinal Herb Pharmacy at the Hung Minh Buddhist Temple at 45 Ly Chieu Hoang, Ward 10, District 6, Ho Chi Minh City.

*Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs*



Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhist Congress (term: 2022-2027).

*Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs*



Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints attend the Lord's Supper.

*Source: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Vietnam*



The signing ceremony for implementation of a coordination program to promote the role of religions in environmental protection and climate change adaptation for the 2022-2026 period.

*Source: Government Committee for Religious Affairs*

## APPENDIX 2

### Religion data

Ordinal number	Religion	2008	2021
1	<b>Buddhism</b>		
	Followers	10 million	> 14 million
	Places of worship	16,984	18,544
2	<b>Catholicism</b>		
	Followers	6,150,000	> 7 million
	Places of worship	> 7,000	7,771
3	<b>Protestantism</b>		
	Followers	> 880,000	> 1.2 million
	Places of worship	340	Nearly 900



<b>Ordinal number</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2021</b>
4	<b>Caodaism</b>		
	Followers	> 1 million	> 1.2 million
	Places of worship	1,290	> 1,300
5	<b>Hoa Hao Buddhism</b>		
	Followers	1.250,981	> 1.5 million
	Places of worship	39	50
6	<b>Islam</b>		
	Followers	72,732	> 80,000
	Places of worship	79	89
7	<b>Bahá'í Faith</b>		
	Followers	7,000	> 7,000
	Places of worship		02

<b>Ordinal number</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2021</b>
8	<b>Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association</b>		
	Followers	> 500,000	> 600,000
	Places of worship	206	212
9	<b>The Seventh-day Adventist Church</b>		
	Followers	16,927	> 18,000
	Places of worship	14	18
10	<b>Tu An Hieu Nghia (Four Debts of Gratitude) Buddhism</b>		
	Followers	70,899	> 78,000
	Places of worship	> 70	74
11	<b>Minh Su Faith</b>		
	Followers		> 5,000
	Places of worship		52

<b>Ordinal number</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2021</b>
12	<b>Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple</b>		
	Followers		> 650
	Places of worship		4
13	<b>Brahmanism</b>		
	Followers		> 66,000
	Places of worship		42
14	<b>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints</b>		
	Followers		> 2,300
15	<b>Buu Son Ky Huong Faith</b>		
	Followers	> 10,000	> 10,000
	Places of worship	8	8
16	<b>Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism</b>		
	Followers		> 6,500
	Places of worship		8

\* In 2008, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs published the White Paper “*Religion and Religious Policy in Vietnam*” (first edition and supplemented).



## APPENDIX 3

### List of religious organizations and organizations that have been granted registration certificates for religious activities

Ordinal number	Religion	Religious organization	Organization with registration certificate for religious activities
1	Buddhism	The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha	
2	Catholicism	The Vietnam Catholic Sangha	

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Ordinal number	Religion	Religious organization	Organization with registration certificate for religious activities
3	Protestantism	Vietnam Evangelical Church (North)	The Vietnam Full Gospel Church
		Vietnam Evangelical Church (South)	The Vietnam United Gospel Outreach Church
		The Vietnam Christian Mission	
		The Vietnam Baptist Convention (formerly known as General Association of Vietnamese Baptist of Grace - Southern)	
		The Baptist Convention of Vietnam (formerly known as Vietnam - Southern Baptist Church)	
		The Presbyterian Church of Vietnam	
		The Vietnam Mennonite Church	
		Christian fellowship Church of Vietnam	
The Assemblies of God of Vietnam			

GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

Ordinal number	Religion	Religious organization	Organization with registration certificate for religious activities
4	Caodaimism	Cao Dai Tien Thien Church	Cao Dai Chieu Minh Tam Thanh Vo Vi
		Cao Dai Minh Chon Church	
		Cao Dai Chieu Minh Long Chau Church	
		Cao Dai Missionary Church	
		Cao Dai Church ANHSHoly Court Tay Ninh	
		Cao Dai Committee for religious reform	
		Cao Dai White Robes Federation of Chon Ly Union	
		Cao Dai Church of Chon Ly	
		Cao Dai Church of Cau Kho - Tam Quan	
		Vietnam Cao Dai Church of Binh Duc	
5	Hoa Hao Buddhism	Hoa Hao Buddhist Church	

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Ordinal number	Religion	Religious organization	Organization with registration certificate for religious activities
6	Islam	The Representative Board of the Islam Community of Ho Chi Minh City	
		Islam Community of An Giang province	
		Islam community (Islam) of Tay Ninh province	
		Board of the Islamd Community of Ninh Thuan Province	
		Bani Islam Monk Council of Ninh Thuan Province	
		Bani Islam Monk Council of Binh Thuan Province	
7	Bahá'í Faith	Vietnam Bahá'í Religious Community	
8	Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association	The Vietnam Pure Land Buddhist Association	
9	The Seventh Day Adventist Church	Seventh-day Adventist Church of Vietnam	

GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

<b>Ordinal number</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Religious organization</b>	<b>Organization with registration certificate for religious activities</b>
10	Buddhism Tu An Hieu Nghia (Four Debts of Gratitude)	Buddha Assembly of Tu An Hieu Nghia	
11	Minh Su faith	Theravada Buddhist Sangha of the Minh Su Faith	
12	Minh Ly Sect – Tam Tong Temple	Minh Ly Dao Church – Tam Tong Mieu	
13	Brahmanism	Council of Cham Brahmin dignitaries in Ninh Thuan province	
		Council of Brahmin dignitaries in Binh Thuan province	
14	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as Mac Mon in Vietnam)		The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Vietnam
15	Buu Son Ky Huong Faith		

<b>Ordinal number</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Religious organization</b>	<b>Organization with registration certificate for religious activities</b>
16	Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism		Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism

***Notes:***

- Religious organizations: 36
- Organization with registration certificates for religious activities: 4 organizations and 1 sect.
  - Buu Son Ky Huong Faith: Its pagodas in some provinces and centrally-governed cities have been granted registration certificates for religious activities, and their Management Councils have received recognition.
  - The Executive Council of the mosque at 12 Hang Luoc Street, Hanoi, has received recognition.

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam**

*(The 13th National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam adopted on 28 November 2013, at its 6th session.)*

(excerpt)

#### **Article 24.**

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of belief and religion, and has the right to follow any religion or to follow no religion. All religions are equal before law.

2. The State shall respect and protect the freedom of belief and religion.

3. No one may violate the freedom of belief and religion, nor may anyone take advantage of a belief or religion in order to violate the law.

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## RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS POLICY IN VIETNAM

Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản

GIÁM ĐỐC – TỔNG BIÊN TẬP

PHẠM TRẦN LONG

Biên tập: Trịnh Hồng Hạnh

Trình bày: Tuấn Quỳnh

Sửa bản in: Hồng Hạnh

Đối tác liên kết xuất bản: BAN TÔN GIÁO CHÍNH PHỦ

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