

New Decree in Vietnam Restricts Religious Freedom

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is deeply concerned about the vague and restrictive nature of a new “decree” in Vietnam relating to freedom of religion or belief that came into force on Jan. 1.

The document, entitled “Decree No. 92: Specific provisions and measures for the implementation of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion” was issued on Nov. 8. The decree supersedes “Decree 22”, which was issued in 2005.

The new decree sets out the conditions for registration of religious activities and practitioners and includes a wide range of limitations on religious practice. Although parts of the decree are similar to the 2005 decree, some new stipulations and conditions are introduced, including new requirements for “foreigners” organizing religious conferences and events in Vietnam.

Nguyen Hung of AsiaNews believes the decree follows the Chinese model of control of religions. Nguyen’s report cites Catholic priests and parishioners who believe this “backward” decree is a sign that the government is “looking for a way to control and restrict the freedom of religion”.

In an interview with Radio Free Asia (RFA), Head of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) Thich Quang Do, who is currently under house arrest, warned that the new decree will “seriously curtail religious freedom” in Vietnam. The 84-year-old leader claims that the decree is more restrictive than previous decrees. The International Buddhist Information Bureau has also expressed concern that the decree increases state control of religions and further undermines religious freedom in Vietnam.

CSW's Advocacy Director, Andrew Johnston, said: "Whilst welcoming the Vietnamese government's recognition of the need for new guidance on the implementation of laws relating to religion in Vietnam, CSW is deeply concerned about the restrictive nature of Decree 92.

Vietnam has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); however, this decree appears to restrict religious activities in a manner not consistent with its obligations under the ICCPR, and Article 18 particularly, relating to freedom of religion or belief. CSW urges the Government of Vietnam to ensure that the right to freedom of religion or belief is fully guaranteed by law."