Montagnard Christians in Vietnam
A Case Study in Religious Repression
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Summary

After attempting to organize violent protests at various locations in the highlands and facing continued failure, some helpless leaders fled into the forest. But the sacred wood and untamed water could not protect them.

—Bao Gia Lai, a state newspaper in Gia Lai province, reporting on the arrest of Montagnard Christian activists

In recent months, the Vietnamese government has increased its harassment of peaceful ethnic minority Christians in the Central Highlands, targeting members of unregistered house churches. Vietnam’s state media has presented the latest round of arrests, beatings, and intimidation as a response to conflicts between rubber plantation guards and ethnic minority highlanders—commonly known as Montagnards—in mid-2010 in Chu Prong district of Gia Lai. Information on the clashes is incomplete, and what specifically transpired is unclear, but in the aftermath the authorities reinforced the security presence in the three border districts of Duc Co, Ia Grai, and Chu Prong, and intensified their efforts to root out and arrest people the government terms “Dega Protestants” and blames for inciting the unrest.

The government declares that many highlanders who belong to independent or unregistered house churches are Dega Protestants, which authorities assert is not a legitimate religion, but a cover for a Montagnard independence movement.

Because Vietnam strictly controls its domestic media, prohibits foreign journalists from traveling freely to sensitive areas outside of Hanoi, and rejects visits by independent, international rights groups, it is difficult to obtain detailed, independently verifiable information about the current situation in the Central Highlands. This briefing paper is largely based on information gleaned from articles in Vietnam’s government-controlled media and supplemented by Human Rights Watch interviews with Montagnards who have fled Vietnam and reports by Montagnard advocacy groups based outside of Vietnam.

1 The term “Dega” is derived from the Ede-language phrase anak ede gar, or children of the mountains. With the politicization of the term Tin Lanh Dega (Dega Protestantism) and its use by the Vietnamese government as well as by some Montagnard advocacy groups (some of whom spell it Degar to distinguish it from the government’s term), the term carries both positive and negative connotations.


3 While Montagnard advocacy groups based outside of Vietnam report on abuses in the Central Highlands with varying degrees of accuracy and credibility, Human Rights Watch has found that many of their reports over the years provide useful leads on events as they unfold and are often worthy of further investigation. These groups include the Montagnard Human Rights Organization, the Montagnard Refugee Organization, and the Montagnard Foundation, Inc.
While this paper focuses on Central Highlands Protestants, serious issues of freedom of religion affect nearly every other denomination in Vietnam, particularly those whose followers do not wish to associate themselves with an officially-registered religious organization.

Vietnamese law requires that all religious groups register with the government and operate under government-approved religious organizations. The government bans any religious activity deemed to oppose “national interests,” harm national solidarity, cause public disorder, or “sow divisions.” While many unregistered religious groups are able to operate freely in Vietnam, those considered a threat to the party’s authority are sharply repressed on grounds that they pose a threat to national security and public order. Adherents of some unregistered religious groups, as well as religious activists campaigning for internationally-protected rights, are harassed, arrested, imprisoned, or placed under house arrest. Police and local officials disperse their religious gatherings, confiscate religious literature, and summon religious leaders to police stations for interrogation. In some instances, police destroy churches of unauthorized religious groups and detain or imprison their members on charges of violating national security.

In addition to Montagnard Christians, religious groups whose members face severe restrictions on association, assembly, or freedom of movement—or worse yet, are languishing behind bars—include unapproved or independent congregations of Mennonites, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhists, ethnic Khmer Theravada Buddhists, and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.
Background: A Decade of Unrest

During the last decade, the Vietnamese government has launched a series of crackdowns on Montagnards in the Central Highlands, often in response to mass public protests calling for the return of confiscated land and greater religious freedom. The demonstrations have been fueled by Montagnards’ growing anger and desperation over the steady loss of their farm land to agricultural plantations and lowland Vietnamese (Kinh) settlers, along with tightened restrictions on independent house churches.

January 30, 2011: Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People’s Army) newspaper carries an article about militia forces patrolling with Gia Lai border soldiers and police in Chu Prong district, Gia Lai, near the Cambodian border. Their task, according to the article, is to “control social evils and ensure political security and social order.” One area of focus is Chu Prong, described by Quan Doi Nhan Dan as formerly a “hotspot of social and political insecurity, where hostile forces infiltrated to illegally preach and incite the people to flee to the ‘promised land’ in Cambodia.” ©2011 Quan Doi Nhan Dan

Montagnards, who traditionally followed animist religious practices, began to convert to Christianity in the 1950s and 1960s. With the North Vietnamese victory in 1975, Catholic and Protestant churches in the Central Highlands were closed and many Montagnards, including pastors, were imprisoned. Some Montagnards went underground and joined the highland resistance army known as the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races (FULRO), which fought on the side of United States and South Vietnamese forces during the Vietnam War. As FULRO’s fighting capacity steadily dwindled in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many Montagnards converted—or returned to—Christianity as they abandoned armed struggle.

During the 1990s, increasing numbers of Montagnards joined unofficial Christian house churches.

In 2000 an activist Montagnard church movement—*Tín Lanh Dega*, or Dega Protestantism—emerged in the Central Highlands that combined evangelical Christianity with aspirations for greater political freedom, protection of ancestral lands, and for some, autonomy or self-rule. Less than one year later, in February 2001, unprecedented mass protests broke out in all four provinces of the Central Highlands. Thousands of Montagnards marched on the provincial towns to demand the return of ancestral lands and religious freedom.

In response, the government launched an aggressive crackdown, dispatching military and police units to seal off the region and arresting dozens of Montagnards, sometimes using torture to elicit confessions and public statements of remorse. By the end of 2001, 36 Montagnards had been sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to 13 years, with another 32 individuals awaiting trial. Fearing arrest, many Montagnards went into hiding in Vietnam. By early 2002, more than 1,000 Montagnards had fled to Cambodia, where they were recognized as refugees and resettled abroad.

The past decade has seen ongoing waves of repression and unrest. In April 2004 thousands of Montagnards again took to the streets, with smaller protests taking place in September 2002 and April 2008.

A complicating factor in the Central Highlands has been the mutual distrust between the government and the highlanders. The government asserts that Montagnards belonging to independent house churches are using religion as a front for political activities, while many Montagnards distrust the government-authorized Protestant church in the Central Highlands, the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV). Some Montagnards have opted to worship in village or house churches that they control themselves, rather than affiliating with the SECV. Wary of any popular movement that might destabilize the Vietnamese Communist Party’s grip on power, the government has launched intensive propaganda campaigns, backed up by military and police operations, to eradicate Dega Protestantism and pressure Montagnard

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Christians to join the SECV. Special “Central Highlands Security” units (PA43)7 and centrally-directed Mobile Intervention Police (Canh sat co dong)8 have been dispatched to the highlands to back up provincial and district police in rooting out Montagnard activists in hiding.9

The officially stated aims of the campaigns are to improve political stability and security in the Central Highlands by preventing and repelling plots by “hostile forces”; specifically Dega Protestants and members of what the Vietnam government calls other “false religions.” The government alleges that such groups are advancing separatist politics under the guise of religion, and supporting—or being manipulated by—anti-government groups such as FULRO.

While there is no evidence that FULRO, or any other Montagnard resistance group advocating violence, continues to operate in the Central Highlands, the government treats many highlanders with suspicion, particularly Montagnard Christians who choose not to join the SECV. Despite a lack of concrete evidence about FULRO, authorities typically include condemnation and renunciation of FULRO in public denunciation sessions.

The government’s campaigns include strong propaganda components, with officials convening village- and commune-level mass gatherings in which alleged supporters of Dega Protestantism are brought forward to be “constructively criticized” by officials and villagers before “voluntarily” renouncing their religion and confessing their wrongdoings. In similar fashion, provincial courts often conduct “mobile trials” of people charged with national security crimes.

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7 PA43 is the provincial level unit under the bifurcate command of both its national level organization, A43, and the Provincial Public Security Department. A43’s official title is Department of Central Highlands Security (Cuc An ninh Tay Nguyen). It was founded on July 19, 2004, originally coded as A44, under the General Department of Security. PA43 personnel are dispatched and controlled by A43, although the unit’s budget and logistics are controlled by the Provincial Public Security Department. In early 2010, the Department of Central Highlands Security was re-coded as A90 after Senior Col. Nguyen Hung Linh took over command of the unit from Col. Huynh Hue. Minh Chau, “Department of Central Highlands Security Receives First Rank Medal” (Cuc An ninh Tay Nguyen don nhan Huan chuong Chien cong hang Nhat), An Ninh Thu Do, August 13, 2007, http://www.antd.vn/Tianyon/Index.aspx?ArticleID=6263&ChannelID=3 (accessed March 31, 2011).

8 The Mobile Intervention Police force (Canh sat co dong) comprises primarily officers from the E20 Battalion of the Central Highlands Mobile Police, which is under the command of K20 Mobile Police Command (Bo Tu lenh Canh sat Co dong) within the Ministry of Public Security. The “Special Task Force” (Canh sat dac nhiem) of the Mobile Intervention Police is an elite unit within the E20 Battalion. Hoai Nam, “Mobile Police Command officially operates” (Bo tu lenh Canh sat co dong chinh thu hoat dong), Thanh Nien (Youth), January 16, 2010, http://www.thanhnien.com.vn/Pages/20100116/bo-tu-lenh-canh-sat-co-dong-chinh-thuc-hoat-dong.aspx (accessed March 21, 2011).

in front of hundreds of people gathered at commune centers, thereby expanding the audience and reinforcing the message for others not to follow Dega Protestantism.\(^{10}\)

As part of the crackdown, PA43 units conduct operations with other provincial police units to detain and interrogate persons they identify as political activists or Dega Protestants.\(^{11}\)

Some of these people are formally arrested, tried, and sentenced to prison on national security charges, such as undermining national solidarity (Penal Code article 87), while others are forced to confess their guilt in public denunciation sessions and then placed under close surveillance afterwards.

In addition, the police continue to break up house church gatherings by Montagnard Christians belonging to independent or unregistered congregations operating outside of the officially recognized SECV.\(^{12}\)

September 19, 2009: Bao Gia Lai reports on the “Mobile Trial” of three Jarai men on charges of undermining national unity, conducted in Dak Doa district by the Gia Lai Provincial People’s Court. From left: Nhi, 53, sentenced to 10 years in prison; Am Linh, 68, sentenced to eight years; and Yuh, 49, sentenced to eight years. ©2009 Bao Gia Lai

\(^{10}\) While most trials of political cases in Vietnam are not public, “mobile trials” are conducted in front of large audiences. Ngoc Diep-Ksor H’bui, “The Judicial Protection and Assistance Mobile Police: Striving to Do Good Things,” Bao Gia Lai, June 28, 2010.

\(^{11}\) After mass demonstrations by Montagnards in April 2004, the Ministry of Public Security established “political security” (PA43) units in the Central Highlands to eliminate what it characterized as reactionary movements, such as FULRO, Dega Protestantism, and other “criminal” groups it accused of taking advantage of ethnic issues and religion. PA43 units were tasked to capture core “operatives” and ringleaders of these movements. The PA43 units also provide protection for “mobile trials” conducted in the communes by the People’s Courts. Bao Gia Lai, June 28, 2010; Trong Tinh, “Political Security Section VI (PA43) of the Provincial Police: On the Frontlines of Fighting Reactionary Forces” (Phong Bao ve chinh trich VI [PA43]-CA tin: Chu Cong Trem Mat Tran Dau Tranh Voi Cac The Luc Phan Dong), Bao Dak Lak, December 11, 2009; and Gia Bao, “Three ‘together’ with people in the village” (“Ba cung” voi ba con cua bon lang), Cong An Nhan Dan, October 16, 2009.

2001-2011: Cycles of Repression

The Vietnamese government has launched a series of crackdowns during the last 10 years to suppress political organizing and independent religious activities among Montagnard Christians. Elite security units have hunted down and arrested Montagnard activists in hiding and sealed off the border with Cambodia to prevent asylum seekers from fleeing the country.

During these crackdowns, authorities have committed clear-cut violations of fundamental rights, including arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, and torture. Officials have employed coercion to pressure Montagnards to renounce their religion and pledge their loyalty to the government and the Communist Party of Vietnam. Police have used excessive force to dispel largely peaceful protests, resulting in the deaths of as many as eight Montagnards during demonstrations in April 2004 as well as injuries and deaths of others during arrest and in police custody. At various times, restrictions have been placed on travel within the highlands, on public gatherings, and on telephone communication with the outside world.

At the same time, the government has initiated some reforms to address Montagnard grievances, including official programs to allocate land to ethnic minority families, improve educational opportunities, and bring economic development to the impoverished region. Police who have been posted in villages to monitor activities of suspected Montagnard leaders and prevent escapes to Cambodia have also carried out public works projects such as assisting villagers with farming and village clean-up projects.

The following timeline, drawn from Vietnamese state media accounts, western wire service reports, and Montagnard sources, illustrates a continuous pattern of repression of independent political and religious activities in the Central Highlands during the last 10 years.

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February 2001:
Authorities suppress widespread demonstrations by Montagnards by dispatching tanks and elite troops to the region and arresting dozens of protest organizers. Afterwards, authorities enforce sharp restrictions on public gatherings, church meetings, and freedom of movement.14

April 2001:
Officials announce that 13 military regiments are to be located in an “economic defense zone” in Dak Lak and neighboring Binh Phuoc province, bordering Cambodia. The plan calls for the resettlement of close to 100,000 soldiers, militia, and their families, who are to clear up to 230,000 hectares of land to plant rubber, cashews, cotton, coffee and pepper.15

May 2001:
Officials organize “goat’s blood ceremonies” in dozens of villages in the Central Highlands. Villagers who participated in the February 2001 demonstrations are forced to stand up in front of their entire village and local authorities to admit their wrongdoing, pledge to cease any contacts with outside groups, and renounce their religion. To seal their loyalty, they are forced to drink rice wine mixed with goat's blood.16

February 2002:
An additional 2,300 soldiers are deployed in Gia Lai, Dak Lak, and Kon Tum provinces, with party cadre sent to “hot spots” and remote areas to help maintain order.37

August-September 2002:
Police tighten security and arrest close to 70 Montagnards in Gia Lai, Dak Lak, and Phu Yen provinces in an effort to suppress Montagnard protests reportedly planned in Mdrak district of Dak Lak and Buon Ma Thuot City.18 “We arrested all the demonstrators. Nobody could escape,” a police chief in Dak Lak tells reporters.19

October-December 2002:

More than 600 “fast deployment” military teams are dispatched to the highlands. Authorities intensify propaganda campaigns against “hostile forces” in the highlands, culminating in an October 2002 Party directive outlining the government’s efforts to eliminate “Dega Protestantism.” State media covers officially organized ceremonies in which Montagnard Christians “voluntarily” reject their religion, with Dak Lak provincial television broadcasting programs called “Dispersing the Illegally Self-Elected Protestant Board of Deacons” and “Illegally Self-Elected Protestant Deacons Voluntarily Disperse,” showing Montagnard Christians “volunteering” to abandon their religion. In November, government officials report that more than 2,700 Christians have severed connections with “bad elements who abuse religious issues to sow divisions in national unity,” dozens of evangelical Christians have confessed to having preached illegally, and 37 religious “cells” have been disbanded.

February 2003:

Government and party officials in the Central Highlands are instructed to “eradicate all illegal religious organizations” and to organize official “Swearing Brotherhood” (le ket nghia) ceremonies in which Montagnards must publicly pledge their loyalty to the government and the party and renounce “Dega Protestantism.” To enforce the new directives, police launch a fresh round of arrests of Montagnard Christians and political activists, as well as those suspected by the government of seeking to flee to Cambodia.

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January 2004:
Authorities intensify crackdown on Montagnards, with Mobile Intervention Police searching villages and nearby coffee plantations—sometimes with dogs—to arrest Montagnards suspected of supporting the Dega church movement. After cordonning off a village, prohibiting entry and exit, the security forces then enter the village. They search the homes of villagers suspected of hiding or feeding others, often destroying the houses and beating the inhabitants during interrogation. They then fan out into nearby fields and forests, searching for people in hiding. 26

July 2004:
After widespread Montagnard protests in the Central Highlands in April 2004, the Department of Central Highlands Security (Cuc An ninh Tay Nguyen) is founded after a national conference on security in the highlands presided over by then-Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. 27 Elite police units, such as PA43, Political Security Section VI units, the Mobile Intervention Police, and the “Special Task Force” are dispatched to the region to back up provincial and district police to prevent further demonstrations, root out Montagnard activists in hiding, stop the flow of asylum seekers to Cambodia, and bring an end to groups allegedly taking advantage of ethnic issues and religion to incite social turmoil. 28

Late 2004—Early 2005:
Police operations focus on capturing “reactionary FULRO operatives” in Dak Doa and Chu Se districts of Gia Lai, with state media reporting that 147 people are arrested in late 2004, including Kpa Hung, a key “ringleader” who is shot and wounded during his arrest and is now serving a 12-year prison sentence. 29

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March 2005:
Targeting of Montagnard Christians for persecution, arrest, and mandatory renunciation sessions intensifies after promulgation of legislation that requires all religious groups to be officially registered. Decree 22, promulgated in March 2005, bans any religious activity deemed to threaten national security, public order, or national unity. Instruction No. 1, issued by the Prime Minister in February 2005, specifically bans Dega Protestantism. The new regulations provide legitimacy to government officials and police arresting or forcing the recantation of faith of Montagnards belonging to religious groups that operate independently of the government-approved Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam.

November 2005:
Plans are announced to send 2,000 families from northern Vietnam to live and work in “Economic-National Defense Zones” (ENDZ) in Kon Tum and Gia Lai provinces near the Cambodian border. The Prime Minister also approves a plan to send 400 “young intellectuals” and members of the Communist Youth Union to the ENDZs for two-year terms to “enhance socio-economic development and strengthen defense” in the region.

April 2006—July 2009:
PA43 forces and provincial police launch a “1,200-day campaign” that focuses on capturing “reactionary FULRO operatives” and “Dega Protestants” in Chu Se district, Gia Lai.

Mid-2006:
Government begins implementation of the 01 CA-QS plan by provincial and district police and military Corps 15 to ensure political stability, national security, and defense in three border districts of Gia Lai and for rubber plantations located there. Goals of the 01 CA-QS plan are: a) ensure national security and defense (both political security and security of rubber plantation); b) eradicate FULRO and prevent escapes into Cambodia; c) mobilize masses to turn in reactionaries; and d) stop crime, especially illegal smuggling of rubber.

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30 Decree 22/2005/ND-CP, “Instructions for Implementing the New Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions; Prime Minister’s Instruction no. 01/2005/CT-TTg, “Some Work in Regard to Protestantism,” February 4, 2005.


August 2006:
The Special Task Force, an elite police unit within the E20 Battalion of the Central Highlands Mobile Police, coordinates with PA43 units and district and provincial police to hunt down and suppress FULRO “ringleaders,” focusing on Gia Lai.35

January 2007:
Plans are announced for construction of resettlement villages in border and low-income areas, including four Central Highlands provinces, for young people from other parts of Vietnam to “uphold their pioneer role in socio-economic development.”36

April 2007-June 2010:
Public security forces launch a three-year offensive that targets Montagnard church activists in Chu Se district, Gia Lai.37

May 2010:
Officials launch propaganda campaigns and public criticism ceremonies targeting the Catholic Ha Mon sect in Kon Tum, Gia Lai, and Dak Lak provinces.38

June 2010:
Heightened border security, arrests, and forced renunciation ceremonies take place in Gia Lai, allegedly in response to unrest in rubber plantations in Chu Prong district.39

35 Le Duy, “Youthful Strength of the Special Task Force Police Team” (Suc Tre Cua Doi Canh Sat Da Nghiem), Cong An Nhan Dan (People’s Police), January 22, 2011; Trong Tinh, “Political Security Section VI (PA43) of the Provincial Police: On the Frontlines of Fighting Reactionary Forces” (Phong Bao ve chinh tri VI [PA43]-CA tinh: Chu Cong Tren Mat Tran Dau Tranh Voi Cac The Luc Phan Dong), Bao Dak Lak, December 11, 2009; Ngoc Diep-Ksor H’bui, “The Judicial Protection and Assistance Mobile Police: Striving to Do Good Things” (Phong canh sat co dong bao ve va ho tro tu phap: No luc lam nhieu viec to), Bao Gia Lai, June 28, 2010.


“Legal” Straitjacket for Religion

When a so-called religion becomes a tool in the hand of evil people, it should be considered evil and unlawful and should be eliminated.
—Radio Voice of Vietnam

The Vietnamese government requires religious groups to obtain government permission in order to operate, advancing its official stance that religious freedom is a privilege to be requested and granted by the government, rather than a fundamental human right.40

Legislation promulgated in 2005, Instruction No. 1, outlines the specific requirements for Protestant groups to register.41 They must submit applications to local authorities providing the names of their adherents, along with their photographs and biographical information, and certify that the group will not allow its members to engage or be involved in protests, riots, and “reactionary” organizations such as Dega Protestantism or FULRO.42 Instruction No. 1 reinforces the government’s long-held official stance that Dega Protestantism is not a legitimate religion, thereby providing a legal basis for authorities to force Montagnard Christians to join the government-approved SECV or face criminal penalties:

This is a religion with a dubious origin. The exiled FULRO members deliberately set up that religion of Dega Protestantism just to use as the tool for their dark political schemes of stirring up ethnic problems and undermining our country’s stability.43


40 Decree 22, promulgated in March 2005, provides the implementing instructions for Vietnam’s 2004 Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions. Both laws require that all religious groups be officially registered and subject to government control, and bans any religious activity deemed to threaten national security, public order, or national unity.

41 Prime Minister’s Instruction no. 01/2005/CT-TTg, “Some Work in Regard to Protestantism,” February 4, 2005.

42 Instruction no. 1, passed in February 2005, outlines the process for Protestant groups to legally register. In art. 3 it states that Protestants in the Central Highlands must commit “not to follow ‘FULRO reactionaries’ or be connected to ‘Dega Protestantism’”—which, it adds “is in essence, an organization of FULRO reactionaries.” Decree 22, passed in March 2005, contains similar, though broader, language. In art. 8 (2) it prohibits the “abuse” of religion to undermine national solidarity and “sow division among the people, ethnic groups and religions” or to “spread superstitious practices.” Instruction no. 01/2005/CT-TTg, “Some Work in Regard to Protestantism,” February 4, 2005; Decree 22/2005/ND-CP, “Instructions for Implementing the New Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions,” March 2005; “Proceedings for Registering Protestant Groups,” http://luat.xalo.vn/thu-tuc-hanh-chinh/Kon-Tum/229506096/Thu-tuc-dang-ky-sinh-hoat-dao-Tin-lanh-theo-diem-nhom.html (accessed February 13, 2011).

Overly restrictive registration criteria violate international standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam is a state party. Religious groups failing to meet such criteria can be denied permission to operate. In effect, this makes such groups illegal organizations and provides a rationale for authorities to pressure adherents of unregistered Protestant groups to join the officially recognized SECV. Groups lacking legal status to operate include those whose applications have been rejected or ignored by authorities, as well as groups that prefer to operate independent of the SECV.

The government’s crackdowns and restrictions on Dega Protestants have thus impacted many Montagnard Christians, whether they are Dega supporters or not.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} While the government links “Tin Lanh Dega”, or Dega Protestantism, to US-based Montagnard advocate Kok Ksor, since September 2010 Ksor has called the church he leads “Sang Ae Die Degar.” Other unregistered Montagnard Christian groups in the Central Highlands that have faced official harassment and persecution include independent house churches that do not consider themselves part of Kok Ksor’s group or the SECV; Mennonites affiliated with Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang or with Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh; members of Vietnam Good News Mission Church; and Catholics, especially those thought to be following the Ha Mon sect.
Public Denunciation Ceremonies and Forced Renunciation of Faith

Vietnamese government authorities persist in forcing Montagnard villagers to publicly recant their religion, despite strict prohibitions on forced renunciations of faith set out in Decree 22. Throughout 2010 and early 2011, hundreds of Montagnards in the Central Highlands were pressured or coerced to abandon Dega Protestantism in public criticism ceremonies by signing pledges or through intimidation in private meetings with police or local authorities.

The state media regularly carries accounts of public renunciation ceremonies. In one such public ceremony on September 24, 2010, in Ia Suom district, Gia Lai, 24 people “voluntarily” committed to abandon Dega Protestantism and FULRO and integrate with the community, according to an article in the People’s Army newspaper. Local officials coordinated closely with the provincial military headquarters, village chiefs, elders, and the “wayward” peoples’ families to turn them around, the article stated.46

45 While Decree 22 “strictly forbids coercion of citizens to convert or renounce one’s religion” and states that “all acts of violation shall be dealt with by the law” (art. 2), it has been used as the basis for official campaigns to force Dega Protestants and other Montagnard Christians to recant their religion, based on its banning of religious activities deemed to violate national security or undermine national solidarity. Decree 22/2005/ND-CP, “Instructions for Implementing the New Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions,” March 2005.

Montagnard Catholics in the provinces of Kon Tum, Gia Lai, and Dak Lak also face harassment, forced renunciation of faith, and arrest, especially those allegedly associated with the “Ha Mon” Catholic sect. During the second half of 2010, officials in the Central Highlands became increasingly critical of the sect, whose popularity they allege is being exploited by FULRO exiles. State media reported in November that the “elusive” sect has penetrated not only into several districts in Gia Lai but to Dak Lak province further south.\(^47\)

In November 2010, Kon Tum Bishop Michael Hoang Duc Oanh diocese released a public pastoral letter to his diocese to raise his concerns about local authorities preventing him from conducting mass services and harassing and threatening members of his parish.\(^48\) Despite this, police prevented him from celebrating Christmas mass with members of his diocese in Kbang district, Gia Lai.\(^49\)

Examples of civilians being pressured, coerced, or forced to publicly renounce their religion, or being harassed and denounced for alleged political activities at public denunciation ceremonies during 2010 include the following incidents, which were covered in the state media:\(^50\)

- **On June 6, 2010**, as part of an official public ceremony in Dak Mil district, Dak Nong province to launch a “mass movement to protect national security,” two men were brought forward to publicly confess to supporting Dega Protestantism and FULRO.\(^51\)

- **Starting in June 2010**, officials in the Central Highlands organized a propaganda campaign against a Catholic sect known as “Ha Mon” (named after the commune

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\(^50\) While none of these instances were described in the government-controlled press as “forced,” the voluntary character of a public renunciation of faith is suspect, particularly when it is conducted ostensibly for public display, and reported on in the state media.

\(^51\) The two men were Y Brim (Ama Luong), 38, and Y K Rum (Ama Xuan), from Dak R’la village, according to Bao Dak Nong (Dak Nong newspaper); Trong Ruc, “Thuan An Launches a Mass Movement to Protect National Security” (Thuan an phat dong phong trao quan chung bao ve an ninh), Bao Dak Nong, June 23, 2010, http://www.baodaknong.org.vn/newsdetails.aspx?newsid=4730 (accessed July 10, 2010).
where the group's founder was born). Since its founding in Kon Tum in 1999, the sect has reportedly spread to Gia Lai and Dak Lak, where it is estimated by state media contacts to have 2,500 followers in three provinces. Government officials charge that exiled FULRO members are taking advantage of the sect's growing popularity to undermine national unity and national security. Forced renunciation ceremonies and public criticism meetings have been conducted in Kon Tum, Gia Lai, and Dak Lak provinces for people to confess their wrongdoings and sign pledges to abandon the "false religion." 

- **On July 12, 2010**, state media reported that 97 households, or 297 people, "voluntarily" abandoned Dega Protestantism in the villages of Tok and Roh, Chu Se district, Gia Lai. 

- **During September 2010**, police in collaboration with local officials organized several public criticism ceremonies in Duc Co district, Gia Lai. In one session on September 29, 50 people from four villages in Duc Co district, Gia Lai, were summoned to be formally criticized in front of crowds of commune residents for having “disrupted security and order” on August 25, 2010. After admitting their wrongdoings, they pledged to abandon FULRO and Dega Protestantism.

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• In October 2010, state media reported that 567 households related to Dega Protestantism had committed to “renouncing” the religion in Krong Pa district, Gia Lai, with the commune chief making daily visits to pressure 15 remaining households who pledged to abandon their religion.57

• In November 2010, state media reported on the ongoing “Struggle to Eliminate Dega Protestantism” in Ia Grai and Duc Co districts of Gia Lai, where the border army was breaking up “reactionary gangs” of Dega Protestants in the border areas and bringing them in for public criticism sessions.58

• On November 24, 2010, a public denunciation meeting was held in Hring village, Cu Mgar district, Dak Lak, in which followers of the Ha Mon Catholic sect “volunteered” to confess their wrongdoings and sign commitments pledging to abandon the “false” Ha Mon religion.59

Additional incidents of forced renunciations of faith and public denunciation ceremonies can be found in the Annex at the end of this report.


2010: Rubber Plantation Unrest

After a struggle, the reactionary leaders have bowed their heads, confessed their crimes, and submitted themselves for review in front of the people of the village.

—Deputy Chairman of Chu Prong district People’s Committee, September 2010

In early 2010, a three-year government campaign to root out “reactionaries” and ensure security and order in the Central Highlands neared its target completion date. In April the deputy police chief of Dak Lak province reported on the campaign’s success in fighting against illegal religious activities and groups that “take advantage of religion” to act against the revolution. “In particular, [we] have fought to eliminate the rekindling of ‘Dega Protestantism’,” he said. Since 2001, he reported, provincial police have uncovered and exposed thousands of people linked to FULRO and Dega Protestantism; seized hundreds of documents and reactionary FULRO flags; smashed nearly 30 campaigns to incite mass demonstrations or disturbances; and detected and prevented 412 people from trying to illegally cross the border to Cambodia, while receiving hundreds of people repatriated back from Cambodia.

State newspaper, Bao Gia Lai, described the campaign’s accomplishments in Chu Se district, Gia Lai:

The operation exposed thousands of people including those who provided underground bases for FULRO, persuaded 284 subjects to confess, and destroyed 14 organizations that helped people flee to Cambodia. We received 229 repatriated people [from Cambodia], and wiped out nearly 90 underground networks of FULRO reactionaries and Dega Protestants. We captured 45 people

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60 Various articles in the state media mention the three-year campaign in the Central Highlands, from mid-2007 until mid-2010, as well as previous operations such as the “1,200-day” campaign (August 2006-July 2009) that focused on capturing “reactionary FULRO operatives” in Chu Se district of Gia Lai, and a 2004-2005 campaign focusing on Dak Doa and Chu Se districts, in which 147 “targets” were arrested, including Kpa Hung, a key “ringleader” who was shot and wounded during his arrest and is now serving a 12-year prison sentence. Ngoc Diep-Ksor H'bui, “The Judicial Protection and Assistance Mobile Police: Striving to Do Good Things” (Phong canh sat co dong bao ve va ho tro tu phap: No luc lam nhieu viec tot), Bao Gia Lai, June 28, 2010; D.A., “1,200 Days Hunting Dangerous FULRO” (1,200 Ngay Truy Bat Nhung Ten Fulro Nguy Hiem), Cong An Than Nh Pho Da Nang, August 4, 2009; Tung Duy, “FULRO’s Nemesis” (Khac tinh cua FULRO), Viet Bao Online, August 18, 2005, http://vietbao.vn/The-gioi-tre/Khac-tinh-cua-Fulro/70020908/504/ (accessed September 21, 2010).

including those who we persuaded to surrender, and wrote off five FULRO groups in hiding; [this included] two special projects to pursue and arrest FULRO leaders who fled to the jungle to continue stirring up trouble. We seized 106 cell phones, SIM cards, and some reactionary documents....

In mid-2010, four clashes reportedly took place between June 10 and 22 between Montagnard villagers and rubber plantation guards in Chu Prong district of Gia Lai (for details, see Annex). This prompted authorities to reinvigorate their offensive against Dega Protestants, whom the government blamed, together with overseas Montagnards, for inciting the unrest. Authorities reinforced the security presence in the three border districts of Duc Co, Ia Grai, and Chu Prong, and broadened their search for recalcitrant Dega Protestant leaders.

In August state media reported on a police operation in Krong Pa district, Gia Lai, to root out Dega Protestants, who were allegedly inciting workers, sending false information and accusations to overseas groups, and carrying out other “disruptive conspiracies.”

In just a short time, the Krong Pa District Public Security Team has made timely discoveries of criminals and thoroughly rooted them out; forced criminals to confess to conspiring and using tricks to take advantage of Protestantism to act for FULRO to oppose the government's authority. [The security team] has thereby acted in time to prevent plots to incite demonstrations and riots in the district.

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On August 25, 2010, police arrested four leading Dega Protestants in Chu Prong: Ro Mah Hit, Kpuih Do, Kpa Thom, and Ro Lah K’lanh. They were accused of inciting the “robberies and civil disturbances” in June. According to Bao Gia Lai:

In these targets’ abodes, the police found lists of people who participated in meetings or donated money, a number of papers connected to reactionary people in prison, and propaganda VCDs about the so-called “Dega Protestantism” and “Dega State.”

Chu Prong district authorities mobilized civil defense forces in seven communes and localities to address the resurgence of Dega Protestantism in the district and arrest key “targets.” Bao Gia Lai quoted Nguyen Anh Dung, deputy chairman of the district People’s Committee, as saying: “A number of subjects stealthily carry out activities against our state, steal latex, and rob people of their property.”

The following day, August 26, another “disturbance” took place in Chu Prong, according to Bao Gia Lai. After the rubber company’s guards arrested one person who “stole” rubber latex, the article stated, more than 70 people from two villages arrived at the plantation, causing a riot.

In September Montagnard advocacy groups in the United States began to report that security forces had arrested and detained people in Chu Prong in August and September and sealed off several other districts in Gia Lai, bordering Cambodia.

Meanwhile, officials began to step up public denunciation sessions focusing on Dega Protestants allegedly linked to the rubber plantation unrest in Chu Prong and the adjoining border districts of Duc Co and Ia Grai. In a state media report on September 18, provincial


68 According to the US-based Montagnard Refugee Organization (MRO), police and soldiers arrested and beat eight Montagnard Christians as they gathered for house church services in Chu Prong between August 21 and September 2. Of the eight, three were also named in Bao Gia Lai’s accounts of arrests carried out in August. On September 28 and October 14, police summoned another 22 Montagnard Christians to Bo Ngoong commune police station in Chu Se district, Gia Lai, where they were beaten, detained, and threatened for “worshipping God,” according to MRO. The US-based Montagnard Foundation, Inc. (MFI) reported that on August 22, soldiers and police launched “military operations” in five districts of Gia Lai to “wipe out” Dega Christians. MRO email correspondence with Human Rights Watch, September 6, 10, and 27, 2010, and November 1, 2010; MFI press release, “Vietnam Launches ‘Military Wipe Out’ Operation on Degar Christians in the Central Highlands,” September 15, 2010.
authorities announced that Dega Protestantism and FULRO were “actively recovering” in the three districts of Ia Gra, Chu Prong, and Duc Co and spreading to Chu Puhand Krong Pa districts.  

Government officials justified the arrests and pressure on Dega Protestants by accusing them of inciting the rubber plantation riots under the direction of FULRO members living in the United States. According to articles in the state media:

Just a few days after these Dega Protestants were captured, the latex robberies and civil disturbances quickly settled down. This proves even more clearly the inciting role organized by these reactionary FULROs in exile.  


Ongoing Arrest and Imprisonment

Since 2001, more than 350 Montagnards have been sentenced to long prison sentences on vaguely-defined national security charges for their involvement in public protests and unregistered house churches considered subversive by the government, or for trying to flee to Cambodia to seek asylum. They include Dega church activists as well as Montagnard Christians who do not describe themselves as followers of Dega Protestantism, including pastors, house church leaders, and land rights activists. Charges brought against them include undermining national solidarity (Penal Code article 87) or disrupting security (article 89). 71

At least 65 of the Montagnards imprisoned since 2001 were arrested trying to seek safety and political asylum in Cambodia. They were sentenced to prison in Vietnam on charges of “fleeing abroad to oppose the People’s Administration” (article 91).

By making peaceful dissent and unsanctioned religious activities criminal acts, the Vietnamese government disregards fundamental rights and Vietnam’s own commitments under international human rights treaties it has signed, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, acceded to by Vietnam in 1982. The forced return of asylum seekers violates the rights to leave one’s country and to seek asylum outside of one’s country, which are recognized in articles 13 and 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 72

At least 250 Montagnards currently remain in prison or are awaiting trial. During 2009 and 2010, Vietnamese state media reported that 12 Montagnards were tried and sentenced to prison; it is unknown how many others were tried in proceedings not covered in the state press, or were detained without trial in government “education centers” (co so giao duc or trung tam giao duc thuong xuyen). 73

The arrests are ongoing, with more than 70 Montagnards arrested or detained during 2010 in Gia Lai alone.


72 Forced return of asylum seekers is also in violation of Cambodia’s obligations as a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol not to return people to a place where their lives or liberty are at risk, or where they face the possibility of being tortured.

73 Ordinance 44/2002/PL-UBTVQH10 authorizes placing people suspected of threatening national security in detention for up to two years without trial in so-called “education establishments” (co so giao duc) operated by the Ministry of Public Security.
Torture and Mistreatment in Custody

Montagnards who are arrested are often severely beaten or tortured in police custody and pre-trial detention.  

Since 2001, at least 25 Montagnards have died in prisons, jails, or police lock-ups after beatings or illnesses sustained while in custody, or shortly after being prematurely released by prison authorities to a hospital or home.  

Authorities arrested Y Ben Hôđok in Dak Lak province in late April 2008 regarding his participation in protests earlier that month in Dak Lak and the subsequent flight to Cambodia of several people from his village. Then 29 years old, Hôđok was arrested the evening of April 28 as he was coming home from work. Police took him to Buon Ma Thuot city, where he was detained for three days incommunicado, despite repeated requests by his wife and mother to see him.

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74 Human Rights Watch has documented the widespread practice of police beating and mistreating suspects in custody in Vietnam, even for routine traffic violations. In an alarming number of cases, detainees die after beatings inflicted by police while in custody. People arrested on national security charges because of their religious or political beliefs are even more susceptible to torture, not only because police want to extract information or confessions from them, but because they are routinely held incommunicado, without access to legal representation and sometimes even family members, during their pre-trial detention period, which can last from three months to more than one year. See “Vietnam: Widespread Police Brutality, Deaths in Custody,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 22, 2010, http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/09/22/vietnam-widespread-police-brutality-deaths-custody.

75 Information about Montagnard prisoners, including those who died in prison or shortly after their early release to a hospital or home, is based on Human Rights Watch interviews with former Montagnard prisoners, families of Montagnard prisoners, and Montagnard advocacy groups in the United States from 2001 to 2011, as well as articles in Vietnam’s state media, international wire service reports, and reports by the US State Department and US Commission on International Religious Freedom during the same time period.
On May 1, 2008, the police told Hdok’s wife that he hanged himself during a break in his interrogation and told them to pick up his body, which had been brought to the hospital. His head was broken, his ribs were broken, his leg was broken, and his teeth were knocked out,” a family member told Human Rights Watch.

Among those recently sentenced to prison were Ksor Y Du and Kpa Y Co, described in a 2010 US State Department report as “lay preachers affiliated with the Good News Mission Church.” In November 2010 the Phu Yen provincial court sentenced them to prison terms of six and four years, respectively, for “undermining national unity” under article 87.

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In January 2010 the Gia Lai provincial court handed down prison sentences to two Montagnards, Rmah Hlach and Siu Koch, on the same charges. Their arrests in July 2009 in Chu Se district, Gia Lai, were heralded in the *People’s Police* newspaper as one of the high points of the three-year campaign to eliminate Dega Protestantism:

In a 1,200-day special operation that the Gia Lai police have recently closed, the police captured every relevant criminal in Chu Se district, an enormous victory which shows ever more clearly one fact: none of the enemy’s dark schemes will ever succeed in this land of Tay Nguyen (the Central Highlands).79

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Recommendations

Human Rights Watch recommends that Vietnam’s bilateral donors, including the European Union, Japan, and the United States, press Vietnam to improve its record on religious freedom by meeting the following benchmarks. Until these benchmarks are met, Human Rights Watch recommends that the United States reinstate Vietnam’s designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom violations.

To the Vietnamese Government

- Allow all independent, religious organizations to freely conduct religious activities and govern themselves. Churches and denominations that do not choose to join one of the officially authorized religious organizations with government-appointed governing boards should be allowed to operate independently.
- Release or grant amnesty to all people imprisoned or detained because of their nonviolent religious and political beliefs and practices.
- Investigate and punish those responsible for all instances of violence against religious believers, including by civilians acting in concert with government officials. Such incidents include the violent suppression of the April 2004 protests by Montagnards in the Central Highlands, and reports of torture, beatings, and killings of Montagnards in police custody, jails, prisons, and re-education camps.
- Ensure that all domestic legislation addressing religious affairs is brought into conformity with international human rights standards, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Amend provisions in domestic law that criminalizes certain religious activities on the basis of imprecisely-defined “national security” crimes.
- Amend Ordinance No. 21/2004/PL-UBTVQH11 on Beliefs and Religion to include a provision that prohibits forced renunciation ceremonies by government officials, linked to specific disciplinary measures for offenders.
- Enforce provisions in Instruction No. 01/2005/CT-TTg, “Some Work Regarding Protestantism,” that outlaw forced renunciations of faith and establish specific penalties for those who carry out such practices.
- Permit outside experts, including those from the United Nations (UN) and independent international human rights organizations, to have access to religious followers in Vietnam, including members of denominations not officially recognized by the government.
• Invite the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and the UN special rapporteur on torture to visit Vietnam to investigate violations of religious freedom and other rights abuses committed against members of churches that are not officially sanctioned by the government.
# Annex: Harassment, Arrests, and Forced Recantations of Faith of Montagnard Christians in Vietnam's Central Highlands

## Chronology of Events During 2010

*Compiled from Vietnamese State Media Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>Tok and Rok villages</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>Dak Lak</td>
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<td>Report by deputy director of Dak Lak Provincial Public Security regarding</td>
<td>Dak Lak Provincial Public Security Deputy Director Thoal Y H’mook reports that since 2001, “provincial police have discovered and exposed thousands of people linked to FULRO”</td>
<td>C.V.T., “Working to Ensure Security and Order in Dak Lak Province,” by Thoal Y H’mook, deputy director of Dak Lak Provincial Public Security, at the</td>
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<td>May 26, 2010</td>
<td>Kon Tum</td>
<td>Sa Thay district</td>
<td>State media article about the origins of the Ha Mon Catholic sect in Kon Tum in 1999, which has reportedly spread to ethnic minority areas in Gia Lai and Dak Lak provinces since late 2009.</td>
<td>The article alleges that the Ha Mon Catholic sect is a “fake religion” that is being taken advantage of by exiled FULRO to abuse religious freedom and undermine national unity and national security; also inciting people not to believe the policies and programs of the state. Some people are abandoning their work, school, etc., to participate; meanwhile the group calls for monetary contributions. After being exposed by Kon Tum authorities, the article states, sect founder Y Gyin and 32 followers reportedly go into hiding, under the direction of FULRO exiles, who call them “Dega Catholics”.</td>
<td>Le Duy &amp; Thanh Khiet, “The Deceptive Nature of the So-called ‘Ha Mon’ Religion” (Ban chat lua bip cua cai goi la 'Dao Ha Mon'), <em>Cong An Thanh pho Da Nang</em> (Da Nang Police), May 26, 2010, <a href="http://cadn.com.vn/News/An-Ninh-Doi-Song/CA-Pha-An/2010/5/26/42971.ca">http://cadn.com.vn/News/An-Ninh-Doi-Song/CA-Pha-An/2010/5/26/42971.ca</a> (accessed June 15, 2010).</td>
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<td>June 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Mang Yang, Dak Doa districts</td>
<td>Forced Renunciations; propaganda campaign against Ha Mon Catholic sect.</td>
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</table>
* Bao Gia Lai reports:  
  o 20 households with 83 people “voluntarily” agree to abandon Ha Mon sect in Jo Long village, Ha Ra commune, Mang Yang district.  

**Chu Prong Rubber Plantation Unrest: Overview and Summary of Events, June 10-August 26**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 10 – August 26, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district: Chu Prong Rubber Plantations</td>
<td>On September 9, 2010, Bao Gia Lai carried its first accounts of unrest in Chu Prong rubber plantations that started in June 2010. Authorities blame the unrest on lazy youth quitting their jobs who have been incited by Dega Protestants and exiled FULRO.</td>
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* Bao Gia Lai reports:  
  o June 10: Youths clash with rubber plantation defense forces.  
  o June 15: More villagers arrive, riot ensues; commune police and company defense forces are called in to disperse the crowd.  
  o June 19: Another big conflict when many villagers return; 80 police and plantation defense forces are called in.  
  o June 22: Villagers return to 'take revenge'.  

**Details, Rubber Plantation Unrest in Chu Prong, June and August 2010**

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>June 10, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district: Team 24</td>
<td>Conflict between youth from Mui village allegedly trying to enter Team 24 Suoi Mo Rubber Plantation and try</td>
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* Bao Gia Lai states that six youths, led by brothers Ro Lah Dau and Ro Lah Den, enter Team 24 Suoi Mo Rubber Plantation and try | Ngoc Tan, “Chu Prong: ‘Hot’ Rubber Plantations” (Chu Prong: Nhung vuon cao su dang ‘nong’), Bao Gia Lai, |
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<tr>
<td>June 15, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district: Ia O commune, Tung village</td>
<td>Security forces try to stop 30 people from Tung village from “stealing latex”; people reportedly fight back.</td>
<td><em>Bao Gia Lai:</em> “On June 15, around 30 people from Tung village, la O commune entered a lot to steal latex. When security arrived to stop them they immediately began breaking the bowls containing latex, using bows and catapults to fight back.”</td>
<td><em>Ngoc Tan,</em> “Chu Prong: ‘Hot’ Rubber Plantations” (Chu Prong: Nhung vuon cao su dang ’nong’), <em>Bao Gia Lai,</em> September 9, 2010.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 19, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district: Team 3 Rubber Plantation in la Grang commune Villagers from Canh village, Binh Giao Commune</td>
<td>Unrest at Team 3 Unity Rubber Plantation in la Grang commune. 80 commune and district public security officers and company guards are dispatched to quell the riot by hundreds of Montagnards from Canh village, Binh Giao commune.</td>
<td><em>Bao Gia Lai:</em> “A particularly serious incident occurred on June 19.... Around 50 people from Canh village, Binh Giao commune, carrying iron bars and knives flagrantly entered a lot in order to steal latex. Security forces and the workers came to request that they leave, but they fiercely resisted. In the struggle, Ro Ma Ul and Siu Hien were slightly injured on their arms. Immediately, these two people ran back to their village shouting that they had been beaten. Thus incited, hundreds of villagers carrying sticks with iron nail tips and blades began to chase off security forces and workers,”</td>
<td><em>Ngoc Tan,</em> “Chu Prong: ‘Hot’ Rubber Plantations” (Chu Prong: Nhung vuon cao su dang ’nong’), <em>Bao Gia Lai,</em> September 9, 2010.</td>
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<td>June 22, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district: Team 3 Rubber Plantation</td>
<td>More unrest at Team 3 Rubber Plantation. Villagers return to Team 3 Unity Rubber Plantation to “take revenge.”</td>
<td>Bao Gia Lai reports that on June 22 “a crowd of villagers carrying knives and bows came to ‘take revenge.’ Hundreds of bowls of latex and three motorbikes belonging to workers were destroyed… ‘Since that day, we workers are afraid to enter the plantation. The security guards have to be equipped with iron shields to guard against being attached with dangerous weapons...’”</td>
<td>Ngoc Tan, “Chu Prong: ‘Hot’ Rubber Plantations” (Chu Prong: Nhung vuon cao su dang ’nong’), Bao Gia Lai, September 9, 2010.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 26, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district: Team 12 Rubber Plantation</td>
<td>Rubber plantation Guard Forces arrest a Montagnard for theft at Team 12 Rubber Plantation. Riot reportedly ensues when 30 Montagnards from Bac I village arrive, followed later by 40 people from Chu Prong town.</td>
<td>Bao Gia Lai “On August 26 at Lot 28B belonging to Team 12 Mo Suoi Farming Community Ltd.—a member of Chu Prong Rubber—a number of people in Lan village (Ia Kly commune) flagrantly entered the lot in order to steal latex. The Guard Forces arrived to intervene, arresting one person for theft. Shortly afterwards there was a riot in the lot. Around 30 people—mostly youths from Bac I village (Ia Phin commune), thundered in on their motorcycles. Some held sticks, others knives, and they forced their way into the lot and destroyed over 300 bowls of rubber. When Guard Forces and workers arrived and...”</td>
<td>Ngoc Tan, “Chu Prong: ‘Hot’ Rubber Plantations,” (Chu Prong: Nhung vuon cao su dang ’nong’), Bao Gia Lai, September 9, 2010.</td>
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| June 20, 2010 | Dak Nong | Dak Mil district: Thuan An commune, Sar Par village | Mass movement launched to protect national security; two people are brought for public criticism. | requested that the rioters disperse, a number of these people began to throw the bowls used to hold latex into the crowd. The head of the team, Nguyen Huy Duong—who was struck in the eye—had to go to the hospital for emergency treatment. Only when the company’s Guard Forces cooperated with the commune’s police forces did the rioters agree to disperse....

“Also during this time over 40 people from Giang village [Chu Prong town] entered the lot to smash bowls of latex. When security arrived, they demanded 300,000 dong before they would agree to leave the plantation!” | Trong Ruc, “Thuan An Launches a Mass Movement to Protect National Security” (Thuan An phát động phong trào quanh chung bao ve an ninh), Dak Nong (Dak Nong newspaper), June 23, 2010, http://www.baodaknong.org.vn/newsdetails.aspx?newsid=4730 (accessed July 10, 2010). |
<p>| June 28, 2010 | Gia Lai | Chu Se district | State media article assesses impact of three-year campaign targeting Chu Se district of Gia Lai by Bao gia lai | Combat unit belonging to the Mobile Police Battalion, the Police Special Forces Platoon...and other units have been deployed to effectively struggle against crime. Capt. Ngo Thanh Son, Deputy Chief of the Battalion and Ngoc Diep-Ksor H'bui, “The Judicial Protection and Assistance Mobile Police: Striving to Do Good Things” (Phong canh sat co dong bao ve va ho tro tu phap: No luc lam nhieu viec tot), |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |</p>
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<tr>
<td>July 5, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai, Duc Co, Ia Grai, Chu Prong districts</td>
<td>State media article assesses four-year campaign by provincial and district police and military Corps 15 under the 01 CA-QS plan to ensure political stability, national security, and defense in three border districts of Gia Lai and for rubber plantations located there. Goals of the 01 CA-QS plan are: a) ensure national security and defense (both political security and security of rubber plantation);</td>
<td>Bao Gia Lai: Army owned rubber companies and police forces “actively coordinate propaganda to mobilize the people to submit to the Party's policies and guidelines and the state’s legal regulations, to refute distortions propagated by FULRO and prevent illegal crossings to Cambodia. Since the launch of the mass movement for the protection and security of the Motherland, the people have supplied police forces with hundreds of sources on criminals, preventing those who have been fooled by the FULRO reactionaries from escaping abroad, rooting out hidden FULRO cells and handling the illegal trade of rubber…Strictly adhering to the slogan that: ‘The [army] Corps is bound to the province, companies are bound to the district, the workforce is bound to the village’ in order to</td>
<td>Thanh Khiet, “Building National Security and Defense for All Citizens” (Xay dung the tran an ninh—quoc phong toan dan), Bao Gia Lai, July 5, 2010, <a href="http://baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201007/Xay-dung-the-tran-an-ninh-quoc-phong-toan-dan-1949504/">http://baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201007/Xay-dung-the-tran-an-ninh-quoc-phong-toan-dan-1949504/</a> (accessed August 1, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 10,</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Pah, Dak Doa, Mang Yang,</td>
<td>b) prevent FULRO and escapes into Cambodia; c) Mobilize masses to turn</td>
<td>increase the effectiveness of mobilization works, to date 72 out of 77 production forces have organized partnerships with 116 out of 117 villages in the three border districts.</td>
<td>Tran Cong &amp; Thanh Hai, “Unmask the Evil Deception of the false Ha Mon Sect” (Vach mat ban chat lua bip cua ta dao Ha Mon), <em>Bao Gia Lai</em>, July 10, 2010, <a href="http://www.baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201007/Vach-mat-ban-chat-lua-bip-cua-ta-dao-Ha-Mon-1950142/">http://www.baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201007/Vach-mat-ban-chat-lua-bip-cua-ta-dao-Ha-Mon-1950142/</a> (accessed August 1, 2010).</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>Dak Po districts</td>
<td>to reactionaries; d) stop crime, especially illegal smuggling of rubber.</td>
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<td>Forced renunciation of faith.</td>
<td><em>Bao Gia Lai</em> reports that 97 households in the villages of Tok and Roh, Chu Se district, “voluntarily abandon ‘Dega Protestantism’.”</td>
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<td>July 27,</td>
<td>Kon Tum</td>
<td>Mang Yang district</td>
<td>State media story about the Catholic “Ha Mon” sect estimates that 2,500 people in</td>
<td>Several people are quoted in <em>Cong An Nhan Dan</em> (People’s Police) as to why they “voluntarily” left the “false religion” of Ha Mon, allegedly being used by FULRO exiles to</td>
<td>Ngoc Nhu, “The Truth about the False Ha Mon Religion” (Su that ve ta dao Ha Mon), <em>Cong An Nhan Dan</em>, July 27, 2010, <a href="http://www.cand.com.vn/vi-">http://www.cand.com.vn/vi-</a></td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
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<td>July 30, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Phu Thien district: Churoh Ponan A village</td>
<td>Official campaign against Catholic Ha Mon sect and “Dega Protestantism.”</td>
<td><em>Bao Gia Lai</em> reports: “To expose deception, many undercover agents are dispatched to scout out and monitor the situation, mobilize people to report [on suspects] and support the police. Thus within a short time, [we were able to] prevent the leadership of exiled FULRO to revive the reactionary organization Dega Protestantism…. Recently, people who were infected with ‘reactionary ghosts’ were publicly criticized at the village of Churoh Ponan A. After the evil was exposed again and pushed away, peaceful life returned to the villagers.”</td>
<td>Tran Cong, “Gia Lai: Lat tay tro lua bip cua bon phan dong,” <em>Bao Gia Lai</em> (Gia Lai newspaper), July 30, 2010, <a href="http://www.baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201007/Gia-Lai-Lat-tay-tro-lua-bip-cua-bon-phan-dong-1952887/">http://www.baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201007/Gia-Lai-Lat-tay-tro-lua-bip-cua-bon-phan-dong-1952887/</a> (accessed August 15, 2010).</td>
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<td>August 2010</td>
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<td>Police campaign against “Dega Protestants.” State media report regarding district police operations to root out Dega Protestants who are allegedly inciting workers, sending false information and accusations overseas,</td>
<td><em>Bao Gia Lai</em> “In just a short time, the Krong Pa district Public Security Team has made timely discoveries of criminals, thoroughly rooting them out; forced criminals to confess to conspiring, using tricks and taking advantage of Protestantism to act for FULRO to oppose the government’s authority. They have thereby acted in time to prevent plots to incite demonstrations and riots in the district.”</td>
<td>Thanh Khiet, “Krong Pa–Preventing the Saboteurial Plots of FULRO” (Krong Pa–Ngan chan am muu chong pha cua FULRO), <em>Bao Gia Lai</em>, August 21, 2010, <a href="http://baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201008/Krong-Pa-Ngan-chan-am-muu-chong-phachua-FULRO-1955669/">http://baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201008/Krong-Pa-Ngan-chan-am-muu-chong-phachua-FULRO-1955669/</a> (accessed January 21, 2011).</td>
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<td>September 18, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Ia Grai, Chu Prong, and Duc Co districts</td>
<td>Authorities announce that FULRO and Dega Protestantism are actively recovering in several districts.</td>
<td>Gialaipro.com reports that FULRO and Dega Protestantism are reviving in Ia Grai, Chu Prong, and Duc Co; and spreading to Chu Puhand Krong Pa districts; alleges that core leaders are distributing “reactionary” documents, VCDs, etc.</td>
<td>Thanh Khiet, “Gia Lai: Prevent a Plot to Bring Back Reactionary FULRO Organization” (Gia Lai: Ngan chan am muu phuc hoi to chuc phan dong FULRO), Gialaipro.com, September 8, 2010, <a href="http://gialaipro.com/?cmd=act:news">http://gialaipro.com/?cmd=act:news</a></td>
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<td>September 21, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district: Thang Hung, Binh Gia, la Bang</td>
<td>Following the arrest of four Dega Protestants (Ro Mah Hit, Kpuih Do, Kpa Thom, and Rah Lan Klanh), officials organize public criticism sessions and mobilize militia in seven communes and localities.</td>
<td>Bao Gia Lai reports that “Dega Protestantism” has been rekindled in Chu Prong; district officials mobilize “self-defense units from three businesses and militias from seven communes and towns.” Bao Gia Lai quotes Nguyen Anh Dung, vice director of the district People’s Committee as saying: “A number of our enemies stealthily try to destroy our state and steal rubber, rob people of their property. After a struggle, the reactionary leaders have bowed their heads, confessed their crimes and submitted themselves for review in front of the people of the village.”</td>
<td>Anh Huy, “Chu Prong District: Struggling to Defeat the Dark Plans of the Reactionaries” (Huyen Chu Prong: Dau tranh lam that bai am muu den toi cua bon phan dong), Bao Gia Lai, September 21, 2010, <a href="http://baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201009/Huyen-Chu-Prong-dau-tranh-lam-that-bai-am-muu-den-toi-cua-bon-phan-dong-1959465/">http://baogialai.com.vn/channel/1602/201009/Huyen-Chu-Prong-dau-tranh-lam-that-bai-am-muu-den-toi-cua-bon-phan-dong-1959465/</a> (accessed October 10, 2010).</td>
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<td>September 24, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Krong Pa district: Ia Siom commune, Phum Yi village</td>
<td>Forced renunciation.</td>
<td>Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People’s Army) reports that 24 people in five households have “voluntarily” committed to leave “FULRO-Dega Protestantism” and integrate with the community. Local officials coordinated closely with the provincial military headquarters, village elders, chiefs, and</td>
<td>Xuan Hoang &amp; Van Tu, “Abandon Dega Protestantism, to Return to the Community” (Bo ‘Tin lanh De Ga’, ve voi cong dong), Quan Doi Nhan Dan, September 24, 2010, <a href="http://www.qdnd.vn/qdndsite/vi-">http://www.qdnd.vn/qdndsite/vi-</a></td>
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<td>September 27, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
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<td>State media proclaims a Dega Protestant conspiracy involving exiled Montagnards.</td>
<td>people's relatives to convince the wayward families to abandon “FULRO-Dega.”</td>
<td>VN/61/43/7/24/24/124799/Default.aspx (accessed February 2, 2011).</td>
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<td>October 9, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Kon Tum</td>
<td>The article states that in Ia Grai, Duc Co, and Chu Prong districts, reactionary “Dega Protestants” have incited young people to “steal rubber,” as an excuse to cause trouble and incite people to protest.</td>
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<td>November 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Ia Grai, Ia Chia commune, Kom Yo and Beng villages</td>
<td>Officials organize public criticism sessions for 25 members of two “Dega Protestant” gangs operating in border areas. Increased coordination between border guards against “reactionary Dega Protestant” gangs in border areas.</td>
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<td>November and December 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Kon Tum Bishop prevented from conducting Catholic mass services in Kon Tum and Gia Lai.</td>
<td>In November 2010, Kon Tum Bishop Michael Hoang Duc Oanh releases a public pastoral letter to his diocese to raise his concerns about local authorities preventing him from conducting mass services and harassing and threatening members of his parish. Despite this, local officials prevent him from celebrating Christmas mass with members of his diocese in Kbang district, Gia Lai.</td>
<td>“Kontum: Police Prevent a Bishop from Visiting Isolated Christian Communities” (Kontum: la Sécurité publique empêche un évêque de rendre visite à des communautés chrétiennes isolées), Bulletin Eglises D’Asie no. 539, November 9, 2010. “Vietnam: Bishop of Kontum banned from celebrating Christmas Mass with Montagnards,” Asia News, December 27, 2010.</td>
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<td>November 24, 2010</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Provincial Party Committee meeting to assess implementation of Directive No. 5, in which provincial authorities are to promptly detect, prevent, and disable the operations of reactionary groups such as FULRO and “Dega Protestants.”</td>
<td>Bao Gia Lai: Since passage of Directive No. 5 in 2006, it has achieved important results. “The province has promptly detected, prevented, and disabled the operations of hostile forces and reactionary groups inside and outside the country; it has destroyed underground frameworks of FULRO and ‘Dega Protestants’ groups; it has prevented and pushed back hostile forces’ plots and activities that stirred up unrest, riots, and people crossing the border; it has done well in carrying out the task of internal protection, solving conflicts and complaints related to security in the countryside and religion. Thanks to this, political security has been maintained in the province.”</td>
<td>Tien Dung, “Gia Lai: Strengthening political security, social order and safety” (Gia Lai: Tang cuong bao dam an ninh chinh tri, trat tu an toan xa hoi), Bao Gia Lai, November 25, 2010, <a href="http://www.baogialai.com.vn/channel/581/201011/Gia-Lai-Tang-cuong-bao-dam-an-ninh-chinh-tri-trat-tu-an-toan-xa-hoi-1967498/">http://www.baogialai.com.vn/channel/581/201011/Gia-Lai-Tang-cuong-bao-dam-an-ninh-chinh-tri-trat-tu-an-toan-xa-hoi-1967498/</a> (accessed December 20, 2010).</td>
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<td>December 20, 2010 – January 9, 2011</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Puh district (formerly part of Chu Se district)</td>
<td>Arrests, including of Montagnards formerly imprisoned for religious or political beliefs.</td>
<td>Many arrests during or just after Christmas in Chu Puh (former Chu Se) district, including 17 Montagnards from Plei Tao, four from Plei Bo 2, and three from Plei Bo 1. All were beaten and held until January 9, 2011. One was so severely beaten he had to be taken from jail to the hospital. Also briefly detained during this time are former Montagnard political prisoners. Arrests continue to be reported through March 2011.</td>
<td>Email communications from Montagnard Refugee Organization members to Human Rights Watch, dated January 11, 2011, February 17, 2011, and March 6, 2011.</td>
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<td>January 30, 2011</td>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>Chu Prong district</td>
<td>Mixed border patrolling by militia units, border army, and public security forces.</td>
<td>Article in the <em>People’s Army</em> newspaper about the cooperation of permanent militia fighters with Gia Lai border army and public security forces to patrol Chu Prong near the Cambodian border, previously a “hotspot of social and political insecurity, where enemies infiltrated to illegally preach and incite the people to flee to Cambodia.”</td>
<td>Xuan Hoang, “Peace to the Border Areas” (De vung bien gioi binh yen), <em>Quan Doi Nhan Dan</em> (People’s Army Daily), January 30, 2011, <a href="http://www.baomoi.com/De-vung-bien-gioi-binh-yen/122/5639480.epi">http://www.baomoi.com/De-vung-bien-gioi-binh-yen/122/5639480.epi</a> (accessed February 26, 2011).</td>
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Montagnard Christians in Vietnam
A Case Study in Religious Repression

Since mid-2010 the Vietnamese government has intensified suppression of Montagnard Christians, indigenous people in the Central Highlands who are pressing for religious freedom and land rights. The government charges that the unregistered or independent house churches in which many Montagnards worship—which operate outside of the official Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam—are covers for a Montagnard independence movement.

This report, based on interviews with Montagnards who have fled Vietnam and on reports in Vietnam’s government-controlled media, details the latest government crackdowns on Montagnards in the Central Highlands.

Ostensibly responding to unrest in rubber plantations in Gia Lai province, authorities have in recent months reinforced the police and military presence in districts bordering Cambodia in order to root out Montagnards in hiding and dissolve house church gatherings. More than 70 Montagnards have been detained or arrested during 2010.

In addition, government officials have forced hundreds of Montagnard Christians in public criticism sessions to publicly renounce their faith, violating internationally protected rights to freedom of religion and conscience. Those who resist and insist on their right to independent worship face beatings, arrest, and imprisonment. Some are arrested, tried, and jailed on national security charges, such as “undermining national solidarity.” Provincial courts often hold “mobile trials” of people charged with national security crimes before hundreds of people, reinforcing the message not to follow unsanctioned religious groups. More than 250 Montagnards are currently in prison or awaiting trial.

*Montagnard Christians in Vietnam: A Case Study in Religious Repression* calls on Vietnam’s government to immediately end systematic repression of Montagnard Christians and release all Montagnards imprisoned for peaceful religious or political activities.