

## VIETNAM

Vietnam, located in Southeast Asia neighboring China, Laos and Cambodia, is known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and a rapidly growing economy. The country has a history marked by periods of colonization and conflict, most notably the Vietnam War. Due to international pressure, Vietnam made significant progress in protecting religious freedom from 2000-2019. Today, however, while moving towards the West, Vietnam's authoritarian governance and state control over social activities show worrying signs of regression and an increase in documented religious freedom violations, especially in rural areas.



A country of over 100 million people, 86% of Vietnamese identify as nonreligious. Of those who identify with a religion, the majority are Roman Catholic (6%), followed by Buddhists (5.8%) and Protestants (1%) (with two-thirds of all Protestants also being members of ethnic minorities). Smaller groups of Hindus, Muslims, and Mormons constitute just 0.2 percent of the population in Vietnam.

A “socialist republic,” the Communist government of Vietnam has engaged in significant limitations, primarily due to the government's stringent control over religious practices. While the Vietnamese constitution includes the right to freedom of religion or belief on its face, it is not true in practice, as it imposes numerous restrictions, particularly on unregistered religious groups. The government requires all religious organizations to register and seek approval for their activities, which often leads to surveillance, harassment, and repression of those deemed non-compliant, especially since personal details of congregants are often required, leading to feelings of intrusion and fear.

Further, as recent as April 2024, a new government regulation gives the state more oversight and control by requiring religious groups to submit financial records and permitting local government officials to suspend religious activities for unspecified “serious violations.” Thus, religious freedom violations continue through interrogations, arbitrary detentions, and surveillance, particularly against groups independent of government control as well as ethnoreligious minority groups-- such as Montagnard and H’mong Protestants and Khmer Krom Buddhists. To date, over 100 Montagnards have been charged with crimes related to “stirring up national disunity.” Some face up to 20 years in prison. While some have fled to neighboring Thailand for asylum, the Vietnamese government has been known to track them down. For Khmer Krom Buddhists over Easter weekend of this year, as many as 12 Buddhist monks were reportedly arrested while a temple associated with the group was destroyed on the border with Cambodia.

Still, of these ethnoreligious minorities, the H’mong adherents of the “Duong Van Minh” group have been one of the more heavily targeted groups, with allegations of the government forcing members to renounce their faith and even implementing an order in 2023 calling to “eradicate the Duong Van Minh sect.” Indeed, in May of 2022, authorities arbitrarily sentenced 15 ethnic H’mong followers to up to 4 years in prison while another 41 followers were detained in harsh conditions for over 40 days, suffering beatings to renounce their faith.

Vietnam’s main tool for persecution is their 2018 “Law on Belief and Religion” which requires burdensome registration for religious groups and organizations to legally exist and whose application is inconsistent throughout the country. Additionally, two penal codes are used to charge religious adherents with “disrupting national unity” or showing “disloyalty to Vietnamese unity.” Ultimately, they are used to make various religious groups feel like “the other” and “the outcasts” who don’t want to be part of the national unity.



What's more, the Communist government owns and manages all land, leaving religious communities without land-use rights. Not to mention, religious instruction in public and private schools is also prohibited.

Prisoners of conscience also remain in terrible conditions, some for proselytizing, others for organizing "illegal religious activities," and still others for undermining "religious and national unity" via posts on social media (see [here](#)). Independent religious communities across Vietnam are also persecuted for not complying with state control and for being labeled "strange", "false," or "heretical" in the eyes of the state. As these communities face restrictions in their freedom of worship and assembly, they are also pressured by the government to join state-controlled religions.

For Christians, persecution and harassment remain prevalent. In December 2023, Evangelical Pastor [Y Bum Bya](#), who faced persecution for many years, was beaten by local authorities after being threatened to renounce his faith. He was later found dead in March 2024 [under mysterious circumstances](#). Also in spring of this year, Protestant missionary [Y Krec Bya](#) was sentenced to 13 years in prison for allegedly "sabotaging national unity" in Vietnam through his Christian ministry. A crackdown on [house churches](#) also continues to intensify.

## JULY SCRIPTURE

### Psalm 33:22

"May your unfailing love be with us, Lord,  
even as we put our hope in you."

## PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for your love and mercy over us and over the world, knowing that even as darkness exists, it is your **light** that always prevails. **We thank you for the nation of Vietnam and its people** who have been **made in your image** and are **loved** by you. We thank you that in the midst of worrying signs of regression related to the freedom to believe and worship, your strength and power remain steadfast and your eye, watchful. We know that you are with us today and we thank you for hearing us.

Lord, we pray first today for our Christian brothers and sisters in Vietnam who have faced persecution and abuse at the hands of the government over the last few years. We pray for the pastors and missionaries currently imprisoned and/or being threatened. Be near them, Lord, and fill their hearts with hope and light in the midst of darkness. **May your Holy Spirit give them peace and wisdom.**

We pray also for the ethnic and religious minorities suffering today in the rural areas of Vietnam, communities who are abused by government officials for their faith or unfairly treated because of who they are. Specifically, we pray for the Montagnard and H'mong Protestants and Khmer Krom Buddhists who suffer greatly. Give these communities strength, Lord, and **protect them**. We pray for their ability to worship and live in freedom without restrictions and without fear of government persecution. Give them courage.

And Lord we also lift up to you prisoners of conscience and for the many religious groups who face burdensome registration requirements across Vietnam. Lift the restrictions, Lord. We pray for the families involved--protect and **strengthen them**. And for the many religious groups involved, we pray for discernment over their leaders today as they seek to practice their faith freely.

Lord, we know that Vietnam had nearly two decades recently of growth and process towards freedom of religion or belief. We pray for that same direction again for the nation. **Change the tide**, as only you can, and do not harden the hearts of government officials.

**We trust you.** In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

