



MONTAGNARD FOUNDATION, INC.

Dedicated to the preservation of the indigenous people of Central Vietnam

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PERSECUTION OF DEGAR MONTAGNARDS

Firstly, I would like to express my deep appreciation to UNPO for the invitation to speak here today on behalf of my indigenous Degar people known also as Montagnards.

Since 2001 over 1000 Degar refugees have been granted political asylum in the United States having fled across the Cambodian border to UN refugee camps. Thousands more of our people had also tried unsuccessfully to escape to Cambodia, however the Vietnamese and Cambodian authorities in co-operation with each other have sealed off the border and arrested – and befoiled many hundreds of our people.

The reason for this exodus of our people seeking refuge is result of Vietnamese government policy, namely decades of ethnic, political and religious persecution. It also includes corruption and callously implemented transmigration policies and even the murder of our people by Vietnamese authorities. The persecution of Christian House Churches continues today and even as I speak now hundreds of our people languish in Vietnamese prisons. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the US International Commission for Religious Freedom acknowledge the hundreds of our people are unjustly imprisoned for non violent activities.

The sad thing is that these policies show no sign of abating.

Vietnam has also tortured many of our arrested refugees upon their refolement back to Vietnam and many were imprisoned. Due to restrictions on freedom of the press and repression by Vietnam's security forces it is difficult to determine the exact fate of how many of our people are imprisoned as the authorities conduct secret one day trials without proper legal representation. We know however, that the US State Department has also confirmed some killings of our people, but our people inside Vietnam report many, more killings of their relatives by Vietnamese security forces who in many cases take revenge against our people.

In the following video clips I am about to show, you can see interviews and footage of this situation. Some of the footage was clandestinely shot in Cambodian Refugee centers and others include interview of refugees after their transfer to North Carolina. The video also includes interviews with Cambodian politicians confirming the use of bounties being offered by Vietnam to arrest and return our refugees.

SHOW VIDEO CLIP

On December 5, 2003 UN Special Envoy to Cambodia Peter Leupretch denounced the practice by Cambodian Police of forcibly returning Degar Montagnards back to Vietnam. In a statement to the Associated Press he said there were **QUOTE "reasons to believe that there are people in the highlands on the other side of the border who have a justified fear of persecution by the Vietnamese government."** UNQUOTE.

In July 2005 approximately 100 Degar Montagnard refugees were detained and attacked by Cambodian police – some beaten unconscious and dragged on to buses and then deported to Vietnam. This was done under UNHCR supervision. On 21 July 2005 Congressman James Leach condemned this act stating in the US Congressional Record, **QUOTE “From a humanitarian vantage, the repatriation of Montagnard families in these circumstances was unacceptable, and was carried out to the discredit of both Cambodian authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees”** UNQUOTE.

Today the situation of the Refugees has died down somewhat in the press and Vietnam and Cambodian security forces have clamped down and sealed their borders.

Inside Vietnam however, our people report ongoing persecution and the ongoing abuses continuing. I will provide one such example.

On April 11, 2009 at 8am Vietnamese government forces burned down a Christian Church located at Plei Todrah village, in Pleiku province, Vietnam. Four of our people from this village

were threatened by police and subsequently forced to flee to the jungle. The names of these four Christians are - Lo Ren So Blei, Lo Ren So Bro, Po Le Wok and Lo Ren So Hnup. We have no idea today if these people are alive or dead and they remain refugees inside Vietnam.

In closing I ask you to reflect on one more case. This is the case of Puih Hbat the wife of one of our people who escaped Vietnam as a refugee. Rahlan Hre himself was resettled in the United States a few years ago. His wife and family back in Vietnam however, were not so lucky and the Vietnamese security forces interrogated them many times and his teenage son was tortured. In April 2008 Rahlan Hre's wife Puih Hbat was arrested for having prayer services in her home. In January 2009 the European Parliament confirmed in a parliamentary question that she had been arrested and imprisoned stating **QUOTE** *"after she had been leading prayer services for Christians in her house"*. **UNQUOTE**

Unfortunately Puih Hbat has not been heard of since and we believe that Vietnamese authorities may have executed her.

We also believe she was targeted for revenge because the Vietnamese authorities wanted to punish her husband who had escaped to America.

On behalf of the indigenous Degar Montagnard people we ask that efforts be made to account for Puih Hbat and the other hundreds of Degar Montagnard prisoners.

We also ask that efforts be undertaken to protect our refugees in Cambodia but that efforts made to prevent the entire homelands of our people, the central highlands of Vietnam from becoming one large persecuted refugee camp.

Thank you and God bless.