



VIETNAM COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ♦ QUÊ ME: ACTION FOR
DEMOCRACY IN VIETNAM ♦ Ủy ban Bảo vệ Quyền làm Người Việt

Affiliated to the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), NGO accredited to the United Nations, Unesco and the Council of Europe

Notes on Most Venerable Thich Quang Do

"Civilised society should never allow any government, whatsoever its ideology or political creed, to derogate from universal human rights and isolate its people behind an iron curtain on the pretext of "non-interference" into the nation's internal affairs".

Thich Quang Do

● **Most Venerable THICH QUANG DO** (secular name Dang Phuc Tue), is one of Vietnam's most prominent dissidents. He has spent over 30 years in detention for his peaceful advocacy of religious freedom, democracy and human rights. He is currently under house arrest at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). Thich Quang Do is leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), Vietnam's largest religious community which is repressed by the communist authorities in Vietnam. He is also an eminent scholar, writer and former lecturer in oriental philosophy and Buddhist studies, with over a dozen published works including novels, poetry, and studies of Vietnamese Buddhism, including an 8,000-page Great Dictionary of Buddhist Terms translated whilst in prison.



Born on November 27th 1928 in Thai Binh (former North Vietnam), a monk since the age of 14, Thich Quang Do witnessed the summary execution of his religious master by a revolutionary People's Tribunal in 1945. Profoundly disturbed by this image, he resolved to devote his life to the pursuit of justice through the Buddhist teachings of non-violence, tolerance and compassion.

His convictions led him into prison under successive political regimes. But it was in 1975, after Vietnam's unification under Communist rule, that Thich Quang Do began a cycle of quasi-systematic detention for his advocacy of freedom and democracy. **1977**: 20-months in solitary confinement for denouncing human rights abuses; **1982**: 10 years internal exile for protesting the creation of a State-sponsored Buddhist church and the banning of the UBCV; **1995**: 5 years prison on charges of "*abusing democratic freedoms to harm the interests of the State*" for leading a humanitarian relief mission for flood victims; Released in 1998 due to international pressure, he has remained under house arrest at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery since then. "*I left a small prison only to come into a larger one*", he said.

Thich Quang Do continues his peaceful combat by launching appeals in a spirit of dialogue to the Vietnamese leadership for the respect of human rights and religious freedom, the release of prisoners of conscience, the abolition of the death penalty etc. In **2001**, he launched an "**Appeal for Democracy in Vietnam**", a democratic transition plan which received overwhelming support from over 300,000 Vietnamese and hundreds of international personalities. For this, he was detained *incommunicado* at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery for 2 years, deprived even of medical treatment.

He continued his action and appeals despite this, assisting the movement of farmers (Dân Oan) protesting State confiscation of lands (**2007**); expressing solidarity with democracy movements in

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Burma and Tibet (**2008**); launching a campaign of Civil Disobedience to stop environmentally-damaging Bauxite mining in the Central Highlands (**2010**); supporting thousands of young people in Hanoi and Saigon demonstrating against Chinese encroachment on Vietnamese lands (**2011**); launching an appeal for a “*broad-based movement for the democratization of Vietnam*” as the sole way to protect Vietnamese sovereignty (**2014**).

In **2013**, during public consultations on the reform of the Constitution, Thich Quang Do called for the abrogation of Article 4 on the political monopoly of the Communist Party, and for multi-party democracy in Vietnam. These efforts brought him renewed interrogations, harassment and accusations of “*violating national security*”.

Thich Quang Do lives like a prisoner in his monastery. He eats one meal per day, which is brought up to his room and placed outside his door. He is not allowed to preach in the monastery. He is deprived of citizenship rights such as the issuance of ID or residence permit, which means that he cannot travel. His communications are monitored, he is under constant surveillance by para-police, and his visitors are frequently threatened or interrogated. In **May 2017**, Thich Quang Do expressed his wish to travel to Hue to live amongst his disciples at the Long Quang Pagoda. Police prohibited his assistant, Lê Cong Cau from assisting him on the trip and said that Thich Quang Do “was not welcome in Hue”.

In recent years, because of his international fame and symbolism as a world leader for peace, the authorities have allowed some visits by diplomatic delegations, e.g. in **August 2015** by US Assistant Secretary of State **Tom Malinowski**, followed by Commissioners from the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom**; the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, **Heiner Bielefeldt**, in July 2014. While these visits and voices of international support are encouraging, the reality is that Thich Quang Do remains a prisoner of conscience and under strict house arrest.

Thich Quang Do has been nominated 16 times for the Nobel Peace Prize. In November 2015, **91 international personalities**, including four Nobel Peace Prize laureates, signed a letter to US President Obama calling for his release. Thich Quang Do was awarded the **Rafto Memorial Prize** by the Norwegian Rafto Foundation in 2006 for his role as a “*unifying force*” and a “*symbol of the growing democracy movement in Vietnam*”, the “**Democracy Courage Tribute**” by the World Movement for Democracy in 2006, and the “**Homo Homini**” Prize by the Czech Foundation People in Need, under the auspices of the late President Vaclav Havel. He is an honorary member of PEN International, and is adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has pronounced Thich Quang Do’s detention to be a violation of international law (Opinion 18/2005).

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