

37 Prominent Members of the U.S. Congress urge Vietnam to release Buddhist dissidents Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do

Whilst Vietnam's Prime Minister Phan Van Khai made an unprecedented step this week towards dialogue with the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) by holding talks with UBCV Patriarch and prominent dissident Most Venerable **Thich Huyen Quang** in Hanoi, the regime has made no promises to release the UBCV Patriarch and his Deputy, Venerable **Thich Quang Do** ([see IBIB Press Release, 2, April 2003](#)), nor lift the Communist Party's ban on the outlawed UBCV.

Yet Vietnam is under increasing pressure from the international community to set the UBCV's outspoken leaders free. Following an appeal launched by 31 Euro MPs (17 March 2003), thirty-seven prominent Members of the United States Congress have sent a letter to the Vietnamese leadership today calling for the immediate release of Patriarch **Thich Huyen Quang** and Venerable **Thich Quang Do**. *"These courageous leaders have spent much of the last 25 years detained without charge or trial for their peaceful advocacy of fundamental human rights and religious freedom"*, they wrote in a letter to Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong, Premier Phan Van Khai, Communist Party Secretary Nong Duc Manh and National Assembly President Nguyen Van An. *"As a result of these honorable efforts, they have been imprisoned in solitary confinement, released, placed under house arrest, exiled, and arrested again"*.

The 37 Members of Congress stressed that the *"the international community has diligently worked to promote the efforts of the Patriarch and his Deputy"*, citing a recent initiative by over 60 Members of the U.S. Congress to nominate Thich Quang Do for the Nobel Peace Prize. The only "crimes" committed by Thich Quang Do, they said, were that of launching an "Appeal for Democracy in Vietnam" and organizing relief efforts for flood victims. The signatories expressed concern that UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang, 86, who is currently in Hanoi for medical treatment, would be returned to house arrest in Quang Ngai after he left the capital.

"Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and the Venerable Thich Quang Do have suffered long enough for their courageous efforts to improve human rights and religious freedom", they declared, urging the Vietnamese leadership to *"heed to appeals of leaders around the world and facilitate the immediate release"* of the two men. *"Doing so would demonstrate that Vietnam is truly committed to the advancement of human rights and religious freedom"*.

The letter was initiated by Congresswoman **Loretta Sanchez** (D.). Co-signatories included Representatives **Zoe Lofgren** (D.) and **Ed Royce** (R.), co-sponsors of a

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bipartisan “*Freedom of Information in Vietnam*” bill aimed to boost Radio Free Asia broadcasts to Vietnam ; **Christopher Smith** (R.), co-author of the “*Vietnam Human Rights*” bill to come shortly before Congress, which links US-Vietnam bilateral trade relations to improved respect of human rights ; **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R.), Chairwoman of the House of Representatives’ Sub-Committee on International Operations and Human Rights ; **Frank Wolf** (R.), author of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act which provides the U.S. with policy options to sanction countries violating violate religious freedom.

[For the full text of the letter is as follows, click here](#)