

British Parliamentary Delegation is barred from visiting Buddhist leader Thich Quang Do

PARIS, 5 June 2013 (IBIB) – A delegation of Members of Parliament from the UK All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was barred from visiting the leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) during their trip to Vietnam last week. The delegation was in Vietnam from 25-31 May, visiting Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City to reinforce parliamentary links between the two countries and to get an insight into UK activities in Vietnam.

The International Buddhist Information Bureau (IBIB) was asked to facilitate a meeting of the delegation with Most Venerable Thich Quang Do, 85, who is denied freedom of communication and cannot be contacted directly. The UBCV leader agreed to receive the delegation on Thursday 30 May at 10.00am at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery where he is under effective house arrest. A group of nine people, including 5 MPs and staff, and three officers from the British Embassy in Hanoi planned to attend. Finally, however, they never came, and later that day IBIB received a phone call with their apologies for having to cancel the meeting because of last minute problems.

The next day, an official from the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, who asked to remain anonymous, told the UBCV that they had received specific orders from Hanoi not to allow the meeting with Thich Quang Do. The delegation was informed of this merely hours before the visit, and were unable to warn IBIB in time.

IBIB is deeply disturbed that the Vietnamese authorities should prevent this meeting between an eminent Buddhist scholar and Nobel Peace Prize nominee and a delegation of British MPs, who were visiting Vietnam in a spirit of dialogue and mutual exchange. This is an outrageous way to treat international public figures. It is also a clear proof of the political restrictions imposed upon Thich Quang Do. ***“Vietnam continuously informs the international community that Thich Quang Do is under no form of house arrest, and is “completely free” at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery. If this is the case, why is he unable to receive visitors without the authorization of the authorities in Hanoi?”*** said IBIB Director **Vo Van Ai**.

This incident also underscores the discrepancy between Vietnam's declarations to the international community and the reality of harassments and repression suffered daily by peaceful religious and political dissidents in Vietnam. Indeed, [EU High Representative Catherine Ashton](#) recently deplored this *“apparent mismatch between the information provided by the [Vietnamese] authorities and the actual situation”*, especially concerning Thich Quang Do. ***“The EU was informed during***

these [human rights] dialogues that Mr Thich Quang Do was not under house arrest and could be met freely anytime. He was visited last year by Australian and US ambassadors to Vietnam, who found, however, that he is not allowed to leave the premises of the Pagoda where he lives” (April 25, 2013).