

## **European Union deplors “mismatch” between government rhetoric and reality on religious freedom in Vietnam**

PARIS, 7 May 2013 (VIETNAM COMMITTEE) – **Baroness Catherine Ashton**, the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has expressed concern about violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief in Vietnam, and in particular the *“apparent mismatch between the information provided by the [Vietnamese] authorities and the actual situation”*.

The head of the EU External Action Service (EEAS) expressed particular concern about the case of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam’s (UBCV) leader **Thich Quang Do**, whose case was raised by the EU during the bilateral human rights dialogues with Vietnam in January 2012 (in Hanoi) and October 2012 (in Brussels). ***“The EU was informed during these 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.”***

Baroness Ashton pledged that the EU would *“continue to push for the release of persons held in prison, detained or harassed for their religious beliefs”* both in the human rights dialogues and other bilateral contacts, and that *“the case of Thich Quang Do shall also be addressed in this context given the apparent mismatch between the information provided by the authorities and the actual situation”*.

Stressing freedom of religion or belief was a *“key element”* of EU policy, she also regretted that Vietnam had accepted the EU’s call to extend an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit Vietnam, but had still not fixed a date for the visit. *“The EU intends to raise again the issue of the UN Special Rapporteur’s visit to the country if the announcement to extend an invitation is not followed up”*. She also noted that the EU was currently analysing the controversial religious **Decree 92**, which imposes tighter controls on religious activities, and would raise this at the next session of the human rights dialogue.

Baroness Ashton was replying to a **written question tabled by Catalan MEP Ramon Tremosa I Balcells** of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE Group). Mr. Tremosa said he was *“alarmed by reports of grave abuses of religious freedom in Vietnam”*, and government policies of *“intensifying police harassment, intimidation, surveillance and imprisonment of religious followers and adopting new legislation to control and limit religious activities”*.

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Asking what steps the EU would take to obtain the release of Thich Quang Do and other religious prisoners, Mr. Tremosa wrote: *“We welcome the commitment to religious freedom shown by the European External Action Service with the drafting of the EU human rights guidelines on freedom of religion or belief and the creation of a European Parliamentary Working Group on freedom of religion or belief. But this commitment is meaningless unless it is translated into reality and brings freedom to those who are deprived of their liberty because of their faith”.*