

## **Police prevent UBCV Deputy Thích Thanh Quang and Youth leader Lê Công Cầu from meeting Australian diplomats in Saigon**

PARIS, 13 May 2016 (VCHR) – The **Vietnam Committee on Human Rights** (VCHR) strongly protests the unlawful activities of Police in Hue and Danang who prevented the Deputy leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) **Thích Thanh Quang** and UBCV Youth leader **Lê Công Cầu** from travelling to Saigon to meet diplomats from the Australian Embassy in Hanoi who are visiting UBCV Patriarch Thích Quảng Độ in Saigon on Friday 13th May 2016.

Diplomats from the Australian Embassy in Hanoi, including Political Counsellor, Nadia Krivetz and Second Political Secretary Rose McConnell asked to meet UBCV Patriarch Thích Quảng Độ at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Saigon, where he is under effective house arrest. Thích Quảng Độ invited Lê Công Cầu and UBCV Deputy leader Thích Thanh Quang to join him at the meeting to brief the Australian diplomats on current persecution against the UBCV.

However, as Lê Công Cầu prepared to leave Hue on Thursday 12th May, Security Police intercepted him and banned him from travelling. Lê Công Cầu is currently under investigation for his activities in support of the UBCV which Police say is an “illegal” organization. They are threatening to prosecute him under Article 258 of the Criminal Code for *“abusing democratic freedoms to encoach on the interests of the State”*.

The same day, at 4:45pm, UBCV Deputy leader Thích Thanh Quang was also intercepted by Police and numerous plain-clothed Security agents at the gates of the Giác Minh Pagoda in Danang and banned from travelling. Thích Thanh Quang immediately sent a **“Letter of protest against the Vietnamese authorities’ violations of the rights to freedom of movement and residence”** to the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights in Paris denouncing this arbitrary treatment and calling on the VCHR to alert international opinion about this incident.

In the letter, Thích Thanh Quang said he had told Police that he was going to Saigon because the UBCV Patriarch had invited him to meet the Australian delegation, and also because it is traditional practice for Buddhists to pay respects to their elders in the season of Vesak (Birth of Buddha). When he asked Police why they banned his trip, they replied: *“You know very well why we are preventing you from travelling”*.

Thích Thanh Quang also reported in the letter that since 2011, for the past five years, Security Police had kept 24-hour watch on his pagoda, which is also the headquarters of the UBCV’s Buddhist Youth Movement, intimidating Buddhists and systematically

preventing him from celebrating Buddhist events such as Vesak, All Saints Day or even the Lunar New Year. Thích Thanh Quang said Police actions constituted a *“grave violation of the rights of citizens guaranteed in the Vietnamese Constitution and UN human rights treaties to which Vietnam is State party”*.

*“Vietnam has an ongoing human rights dialogue with Australia, and it is about to receive a visit from US President Barack Obama in which human rights is reportedly on the agenda”,* said VCHR President Võ Văn Ái. *“Vietnam cannot seriously consider strengthening ties with democratic countries whilst continuing to use Police harassment, arbitrary detention, denial of freedom to travel and communicate to silence free-thinking citizens. It is unworthy of a country that hold a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council”*.