

## Security Police surround Giac Hoa Pagoda in Saigon

PARIS, 7.5.2013 (IBIB) – The **International Buddhist Information Bureau** has received an urgent report from **Venerable Thich Vien Hy** of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) stating that 50 Security Police surrounded the Giac Hoa Pagoda, secretariat of the outlawed UBCV, on Sunday 5 May 2013 and prohibited the monks from leaving the building.

At 8.00am on Sunday, as Thich Vien Hy and the UBCV's Deputy leader Venerable **Thich Vien Dinh** set out to visit UBCV Patriarch Thich Quang Do at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery, a gang of plain-clothed security agents surrounded their car and ordered them to go back into the pagoda. When Thich Vien Hy asked the reason for this and insisted that they produce a Police warrant, the men simply said that they had received *“orders from above”* and that (sic) *“the Chinese are currently causing trouble”*.



Plain clothed security agents block the lane leading to Giac Hoa Pagoda on 5 May 2013, preventing monks from leaving the premises (Photo IBIB)

The security agents forcibly pushed the monks back inside, and a Police van drew up and blocked the pagoda's entrance. Security forces, both in uniform and plain clothes, arrived on the scene until some fifty men completely surrounded Giac Hoa pagoda, preventing anyone from leaving the building. Several other monks who tried to go out to conduct prayers or funeral services for local Buddhists were pushed back by Police and confined inside the pagoda.

Thich Vien Hy reported that such Police harassments and intimidation are routine in UBCV pagodas all over the country. The situation of UBCV Patriarch Thich Quang Do, Deputy leader Thich Vien Dinh and other senior UBCV dignitaries is especially disturbing. Since 1st July 2012, when UBCV leader Thich Quang Do called on Buddhists to support week-end demonstrations protesting Chinese encroachments on Vietnamese sovereignty, Police have systematically blockaded UBCV pagodas every Saturday and Sunday, confining monks inside their pagodas and prohibiting them from going outside. He called on the international community to urgently examine violations of the UBCV's rights to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of movement and freedom of expression, and urge Vietnam to respect its international commitments to respect human rights.



Security agents block all entries to Giac Hoa Pagoda (5.5.2013 - Photo IBIB)

Harassments and repression against the UBCV were highlighted in the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2013 Annual Report** released last week. Describing the UBCV as *"Vietnam's largest religious organization, with a history of peaceful social activism and moral reform efforts"*, the report noted that *"the UBCV has faced decades of harassment and repression for seeking independence from the officially approved Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) and for appealing to the government to respect religious freedom and related human rights"*. It cited the continued administrative detention (house arrest) of UBCV Patriarch Thich Quang Do, harassments and repression against the Buddhist Youth Movement, prohibition to celebrate Vesak (Buddha's Birth) and other key Buddhist festivals in Thua Thien-Hue, Quang Nam-Danang, Phu Yen and Binh Thuan, the beating of UBCV monks, and the harassment and intimidation of Buddhist followers who

frequented UBCV pagodas and offered donations to *“reactionary monks”*.

The report also reflected the situation raised by Thich Vien Hy, citing *“reports that police routinely interrogate Venerable Thich Vien Dinh and other monks from the Giac Hoa Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City”*.