

Security Police threaten to expel Buddhist monks and cut off electricity at Giac Hoa Pagoda in Saigon for supporting the banned UBCV

The **International Buddhist Information Bureau** (IBIB) has received an urgent appeal for help from Venerable **Thich Vien Dinh**, Superior monk of Giac Hoa Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). He reports that the Security Police and authorities threaten to expel 40 resident Buddhist monks and cut off the electricity at Giac Hoa Pagoda because of his outspoken support of the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV).

Venerable Thich Vien Dinh said that Security Police in Saigon have subjected him to “*working sessions*” (interrogations) over the past two weeks, since he sent a letter to the Vietnamese leadership (*cf* [IBIB 26.4.2004](#)) calling for the release of UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang, Thich Quang Do and all other members of the new UBCV leadership arrested in the government crackdown in October 2003. Security Police said they had received orders to expel the 40 monks residing in his Pagoda.

Venerable Thich Vien Dinh also sent IBIB a copy of a letter from the Director of the Gia Dinh Electricity Company received on 14th May 2004 stating that his electricity contract would be “terminated” and the electricity to Giac Hoa pagoda cut off unless Thich Vien Dinh could produce a certificate proving that he is the pagoda’s Superior Monk. In fact, Thich Vien Dinh has been Superior Monk at Giac Hoa Pagoda since 1973, but he is not legally recognized as such because he has systematically refused to join the State-sponsored Vietnam Buddhist Church (VBC), the only legal Buddhist organization in Communist Vietnam. Thich Vien Dinh said he never signed a “contract” with the Gia Dinh Electricity Company : **“This is simply a means of intimidation”**, he said. Thich Vien Dinh added that the authorities have repeatedly pressured him to put a “VBC” sign over his pagoda, but he had always refused. **“The Giac Hoa Pagoda belongs to the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam”**, he said.

If the authorities carried out their threat to expel the monks and cut off electricity, he told IBIB Director **Vo Van Ai**, it would undermine the religious freedom of hundreds of UBCV Buddhists who gather every evening at Giac Hoa Pagoda. He said it was *“part of the government’s overall campaign to suppress the UBCV and stamp out a 2000-year heritage of Buddhism in Vietnam”*.

The newly-appointed UBCV Secretary-general **Thich Duc Thang** of Gia Lam Pagoda in Saigon, also launched a statement condemning this latest act of coercion against the UBCV : **“This repressive act is part of the Communist regime’s campaign against all Pagodas refusing to join the State-sponsored VBC and submit to**

Communist Party control. They will all suffer the same fate as Giac Hoa Pagoda...".

Thich Vien Dinh has been subjected routinely to harassments and threats since he was appointed Deputy Head of the Institute for the Dissemination of the Faith (*Vien Hoa Dao*) at the UBCV Assembly in Nguyen Thieu Monastery (Binh Dinh) on 1st October 2003. Arrested and placed under "administrative detention" by verbal orders of the local authorities on October 9th 2003, Thich Vien Dinh has been constantly pressured by Security Police to give up his post in the UBCV. He is under permanent surveillance, and is forbidden to leave Saigon, even to fulfill his religious functions at the Thap Thap pagoda in Binh Dinh province, where he was appointed Superior monk in 1995.