

U.S. Ambassador Raymond Burghardt visits UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang in Binh Dinh

At 10.50 a.m. this morning (28, April 2004), **U.S. Ambassador Raymond Burghardt** paid a visit to the Most Venerable **Thich Huyen Quang**, Patriarch of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) at the Nguyen Thieu Monastery in Binh Dinh Province, where the 86-year-old UBCV leader is currently under house arrest. This is the first time that a foreign diplomat has been allowed to visit the UBCV Patriarch since he was arrested along with his Deputy, Venerable **Thich Quang Do** and other UBCV senior monks in October 2003. The monks were traveling to Ho Chi Minh City after holding a peaceful UBCV Assembly in Nguyen Thieu Monastery to elect a new leadership. Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do were both accused of “*possessing State secrets*” and placed under house arrest in their respective Monasteries in Binh Dinh and Ho Chi Minh City.

The meeting was very friendly, and lasted over one hour. Ambassador Burghardt, who was accompanied by his wife and children, recalled the two men’s previous meeting in April 2003, when Thich Huyen Quang was in Hanoi for medical treatment. Thich Huyen Quang, who is recovering from a recent illness, was happy to meet the Ambassador again. He thanked him for his visit, and asked him to convey the warm thanks of the UBCV to the American people, the US government, Congress and the US Embassy and Consulate in Vietnam for their concern for religious freedom in Vietnam, and especially for their ceaseless efforts on behalf of himself and Venerable Thich Quang Do. He said that he had received altogether four visits from US Embassy and Consulate officials, the first during his exile in Quang Ngai, then in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and now in Binh Dinh.

Thich Huyen Quang told Ambassador Burghardt about the grave situation of the UBCV since the government crackdown in October 2003, and the harsh conditions of house arrest imposed on many senior UBCV monks, including Thich Quang Do and himself. The UBCV Patriarch said that he was not allowed to travel anywhere, even inside the province, without asking permission from the local authorities and communist officials – and almost invariably permission was refused. He had made several requests to visit Venerable Thich Quang Do in Saigon. Local officials said they had forwarded his requests to their superiors in Hanoi, but he had never received any reply. Ambassador Burghardt expressed his sympathy, and said that the United States would closely monitor the situation of the UBCV and continue to support the UBCV’s demands for religious freedom.

As the US Ambassador took his leave, Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang said he hoped Vietnam would soon be free. If so, he would travel around the globe to thank world governments for all their help and support, and would surely visit Ambassador Burghardt in the US. “*I hope so !*”, said the US Ambassador.