

Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam holds leadership meeting in Saigon

PARIS, 18 November 2008 (IBIB) - Leading monks from the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) gathered at the Giac Hoa Pagoda in Saigon on 15 November 2008 for a meeting of the UBCV Supreme Bi-cameral Council (Institute of the Sangha and Institute for the Dissemination of the Dharma *Vien Hoa Dao*), to discuss strategies and activities for 2009. This is the first leadership meeting of the outlawed UBCV since the death of Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang in July 2008 and the accession of Most Venerable Thich Quang Do as the new UBCV leader.

The meeting adopted a 9-point plan of action, received by the International Buddhist Information Bureau (IBIB) today. Signed by Patriarch Thich Quang Do, the plan re-affirms the UBCV's engagement in the non-violent movement for religious freedom, democracy and human rights. Whilst stressing the commitment to win back the UBCV's legal status, it also pledges to develop the UBCV's activities *de facto*, even if it is not recognised *de jure* by the Communist regime. Finally, at a time when the UBCV faces increasing attempts to undermine and suppress its movement, the plan of action urges members to be vigilant against groups or organizations who usurp the UBCV's name to conduct activities in violation of its Charter. The main points of the plan include:

I To unwaveringly pursue the path traced by late Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang for religious freedom and human rights. *"Whatever hardships lie before us, we will never shrink from them"*;

I To support the aspirations of Vietnamese at home and abroad to preserve territorial sovereignty, and press the Hanoi authorities to take active diplomatic steps to defend Vietnam's national integrity, beginning with the disputed Paracel and Spratly archipelagos. All border treaties signed with China should be made public, including details of any territorial concessions; transparency on the number and circumstances of Vietnamese fishermen killed by China in common fishing areas should be observed;

I To press the Hanoi authorities a) to urgently re-establish the UBCV's legitimate status; b) to immediately return all UBCV property including cultural, educational, religious and humanitarian institutions confiscated by the government since 1975, first and foremost the Vietnam Quoc Tu Pagoda and the Quang Duc Cultural Centre in Saigon; c) cease political control over the State-sponsored Vietnam Buddhist Church set up by the Communist Party in 1981 - the VBC should not be a member of the CPV's Vietnam Fatherland Front, and d) clarify the circumstances of the death of former UBCV leader Thich Thien Minh under torture by Police in 1978;

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I To continue the campaign for democracy, human rights and religious freedom in Vietnam unceasingly *“until this objective is achieved”*;

I To reorganize the UBCV leadership; step up efforts to set up local UBCV Representative Boards in the provinces and towns, and develop the Buddhist Youth Movement;

I To organise UBCV study groups, debates, retreats, meditation sessions and generally provide greater opportunities for lay-Buddhists and young people to study Buddhism with the UBCV;

I All monks, nuns and lay-Buddhists must increase efforts to develop and practise Buddhist ethics, in order to enhance the UBCV and confront the spiritual and moral crisis facing our society;

I To be vigilant against intensified efforts to denigrate the UBCV, to attack and undermine it from within and without, by those who seek to destroy the UBCV;

I To refute any organization or group of people who usurp the name of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam to exercise activities which violate the principles enshrined in the UBCV's Charter.