

VCHR proposes strategies for advancing Freedom of Religion of Belief in Vietnam at the Danish Parliament in Copenhagen

PARIS, 13th December 2018 (VCHR) – On 6th December 2018, **Võ Trần Nhật**, Executive Secretary of Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) addressed a gathering of Members of Parliament, diplomats and human rights defenders at the Danish Parliament (Folketing) in Copenhagen to discuss the hardships faced by civil society in Vietnam and propose strategies to encourage the respect of human rights, in particular the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

Organized by the [Danish Mission Council](#), the conference on “**The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in a Shrinking Space for Civil Society: Challenges and Strategies**” is one of a series of seminars initiated by Denmark to find solutions to the growing phenomenon of shrinking spaces faced by civil society in countries all over the world. Speakers included **Daniel Toft Jakobsen MP**, President of the FoRB Group in the Danish Parliament, **Michael Suhr**, Danish Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, **Jonas Adelin Jørgensen**, Secretary-general of the Danish Mission Council, **Jørgen Thomsen** of the DanChurchAid (DCA Actalliance), and **Filip Buff Pedersen** of the Danish Mission Council, who moderated the debate.

Võ Trần Nhật stressed the crucial importance of freedom of religion or belief in Vietnam. Religious groups are amongst the only organized and truly independent organizations in Vietnam’s one-Party state, and they are speaking out strongly for social justice and human rights. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), has consistently advocated human rights, religious freedom and democracy in Vietnam, and in recent years, the Catholic and Protestant communities have engaged actively in social movements to defend victims of state confiscation of lands or ecological disasters, such as the toxic spill caused by the Taiwanese Steel Plant Formosa.

In his recommendations, Võ Trần Nhật proposed a two-fold strategy of working with civil society in Vietnam to foster a culture of FoRB and human rights (capacity building, circulating translations of core international human rights instruments on FoRB etc.), combined with concerted international advocacy to press Vietnam to respect its

international human rights obligations. The upcoming [Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#) of Vietnam in January 2019, he said, provides an important occasion for UN member states to press for measurable improvements in Vietnam.

The theme of “Shrinking Spaces for Civil Society” is a major concern of the VCHR. In 2018, VCHR published [an in-depth report on the subject](#), analyzing extensive new legislation adopted by Vietnam to restrict human rights and criminalize the legitimate exercise of free expression, FoRB and other fundamental rights. In August 2018, Vo Tran Nhat presented the report at the [Fourth Southeast Asia Conference on FoRB](#) in Bangkok.