

Summary of 2005 State Department Report on Vietnam

Human rights overview from State Department report:

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is an authoritarian state, ruled and controlled by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). Vietnam's population is approximately 83.5 million. The government's human rights record is still lacking and remained unsatisfactory. Terrifying is also that many Government officials often at the local level still commit serious abuses, despite improvement during the year. Economic developments remained a major influence on the human rights situation as the country continued with its fast transition from a centrally planned economy to a "socialistic oriented market economy." Economic reforms and the rising standard of living continued to reduce CPV and government control over, and intrusion into, daily life. There are still many persons that are isolated in rural areas--including members of ethnic minority groups in the Northwest Highlands, Central Highlands, and the central coastal regions—those people are continued to live in extreme poverty. The government continued to seek greater (primarily economic) connections with the outside world, with some similar change in attitude toward human rights. But they have still a long way to go. There are improvements in the more urban areas, but the country continued to show improvement in this respect due to the Central and Northwest Highlands remained areas of international concern.

Main concerns throughout the report focused on the Central and Northwest Highlands and restricted religious freedom; prisoners and harsh conditions; police abuse of suspects during arrest; detention and interrogation; denial of the right to fair and expeditious trials; restrictions on freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association; restrictions on freedom of movement; prohibition of the establishment and operation of human rights organizations; violence and discrimination against women; child prostitution; trafficking in women and children; societal discrimination against some ethnic minorities; limitations on worker rights and child labor.

Freedom of Religion

Hmong Protestants were subject to detainment without charge; according to the State Department report:

“In July and August 2004 authorities reportedly detained without charge more than 100 Hmong Protestants, choosing a member from each Protestant family in at least 5 different communes in Sapa District, Lao Cai Province. The authorities attempted to force the detainees to renounce Protestantism, releasing them only when they promised to do so. In March 2004 police in Kon Tum Province reportedly harassed Protestant believers at a house church, seized Bibles, and fined the church organizer. Also in March 2004 in Kon Tum, police reportedly detained an unregistered ethnic Gia Rai Protestant pastor three

different times, beat him, and attempted to force him to renounce his faith on each occasion.”

Children

Malnutrition in Vietnam continued to plague children due to poverty. In addition, poverty led to child prostitution and other types of human trafficking.

“According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), despite growth in incomes over the past decade, severe malnutrition remained a problem; approximately 39 percent of children under 5 years of age were underweight during the 1995 - 2000 period.”

“Widespread poverty contributed to continued child prostitution, particularly of girls but also of some boys, in major cities. Many prostitutes in Ho Chi Minh City were under 18 years of age. Some child prostitutes, such as those from abusive homes, were forced into prostitution for economic reasons.”

Refugees

Many of the ethnic minorities in Vietnam's Central Highlands have left their homes seeking asylum in Cambodia; it is often the men that flee and leave their families behind, citing religious persecution. Many of them do not reach the borders, according to the State Department's report:

“Following April 2004 protests in the Central Highlands, a number of ethnic minorities hid in forests and rubber plantations, and some attempted to flee across the border into Cambodia. Vietnamese police attempted to block these potential refugees and reportedly crossed the border into Cambodia. The UNHCR received approximately 775 ethnic minority refugees in its camps in Cambodia. Thirteen potential refugees who received UNHCR protection in Phnom Penh independently returned to Vietnam in October 2004. According to authorities, the 13 persons returned safely to their homes; however, newspaper accounts made it clear that they were interviewed extensively by authorities upon their return.”

Both the Central and Northwest Highlands still face many difficult conditions which are presented in the State Department's report. To read the full report click on the link below.

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