

VIET NAM COMMITTEE FOR ASIAN-AFRICAN-LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY AND COOPERATION (VAALA)

The Viet Nam Committee for Asian-African-Latin American Solidarity and Cooperation (VAALA) is a Vietnamese social organization, established in 1956, to promote people-to-people friendship, solidarity and cooperation with like-minded organizations in Asia, Africa and Latin America contributing to strengthening mutual understanding and solidarity, friendship, and cooperation between the people of Viet Nam and the peoples of Asian, African and Latin American countries; promote peace, people's solidarity, national independence, democracy and social progress for equitable and sustainable development in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Viet Nam has undergone numerous invasions throughout its history. For thousands of years, the people of Viet Nam have steadfastly fought to protect their fundamental human rights - the right to live in freedom and independence, and the right to have their basic needs met. This long history of struggle has given Nam a profound understanding of the value and importance of human rights. Today, Viet Nam not only reaffirms its commitment to respecting human rights but also strives to implement these rights in practice. This is reflected in the continuous development of its legal system and the implementation of specific measures aimed at promoting progress across all sectors of society.

This Report of VAALA will focus on the following groups of rights:

- Right to life;
- Right to Freedom of Expression;
- Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- Right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association;

Right to life

In recent years, Viet Nam has taken important steps to protect and promote right to life through constitutional and legal framework and socio-economic measures aimed at safeguarding human life in all its dimensions.

The Constitution of Viet Nam affirms the right to life as a core principle. Article 19 of the Constitution 2013 stipulates that “Everyone has the right to life. Human life is protected by law. No one may be deprived of life in contravention of law”. Other legal documents, including the 2015 Penal Code and the 2015 Criminal Procedure Code (effective 2018), continues to codify constitutional principles of the right to life and rights related to the right to life.

Viet Nam has clearly demonstrated its commitment to protecting human lives, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, through a proactive public health strategy centered on the people. The country launched its largest-ever vaccination campaign, administering over 204.73 million doses. As a result, 97% of adults over 18 and around 90% of children over 12 received full vaccination - among the highest rates in the region. Thanks to these efforts, Viet Nam recorded one of the lowest COVID-19 mortality rates during the initial waves of the pandemic.

Viet Nam's robust disaster response system continues to play a vital role in safeguarding the right to life, particularly in times of crisis. A recent example is the country's response to Typhoon Yagi in 2024 - reported as the most devastating storm to strike Viet Nam in three decades. The storm caused extensive flooding, landslides and widespread damage to homes, infrastructure and livelihoods. Despite the scale of the disaster, Viet Nam's timely and coordinated response, including effective early warning systems and the rapid deployment of emergency supplies, significantly reduced casualties and helped protect at-risk communities in both coastal and highland areas.

In addition, Viet Nam's efforts go beyond crisis response, focusing on long-term measures to uphold the right to life. We commend Viet Nam's efforts to uphold the right to life through socio-economic measures. Significant progress has been made in reducing poverty, strengthening social security systems and expanding access to healthcare. By 2024, Viet Nam had reduced its multidimensional poverty rate to just 4.06%, a dramatic improvement from 75% in 1975. Living standards have steadily risen, reflected in a notable increase in life expectancy - from 62 years in 1990 to approximately 74.7 years by 2025.

It is important to mention about recently announced schemes of the Government of Viet Nam to fully address housing inadequacies by implementing the scheme to eliminate temporary and dilapidated houses by the end of 2025; applying zero tuition fee for students from primary to high school (12/12) starting from school year 2025-2026; and an ambitious scheme of free healthcare by 2030. We applaud the great effort and commitment of the Government of Viet Nam in upholding and guaranteeing the universal rights to a decent life for all, especially in the areas of housing, education and health care.

Right to Freedom of Expression

We believe that Viet Nam has made notable progress in expanding public access to information and strengthening communication channels that serve the people. As of September 2023, Viet Nam had 6 major multimedia communication agencies and 798 press agencies, including 127 newspapers and 671 magazines. Additionally, 72 organizations were active in radio and television broadcasting;

78 domestic radio channels, 194 domestic TV channels, and 45 international TV channels.

In addition to traditional forms of journalism, Viet Nam has also seen the rise of newer and more dynamic forms of media such as mobile journalism, social media-based reporting, and AI-assisted journalism. These emerging formats are increasingly meeting the diverse and evolving information needs of the public, particularly among younger generations and those living in more remote or underserved areas.

Vietnamese people have increasingly better access to modern information technology, especially the Internet. Since its initial internet connection 26 years ago, Viet Nam has embraced digital transformation at a national scale. By September 2023, over 78 million people - nearly 80% of the population - were internet users, placing Viet Nam 13th globally and showing a 21% increase since 2019. The telecommunications network covers 99.73% of villages nationwide. Fiber optic infrastructure has reached 100% of communes, wards and towns; 91% of hamlets; 100% of schools; and 78.3% of households. These figures reflect a strong foundation for enabling citizens, regardless of location, to connect, share, and access information with ease.

Social media usage in Viet Nam is also among the highest globally. As of 2023, the country ranked in the top 10 worldwide for users on major platforms. Specifically, Viet Nam had 66.2 million Facebook users (ranking 7th globally), 50.6 million users (6th globally), and 63 million YouTube users (9th globally).

The press in Viet Nam has become a platform for public discourse by social organizations and the people. It serves as an important tool for protecting social interests and the freedoms of citizens, and plays a vital role in monitoring and supervising the implementation of state policies and laws. Sessions of the National Assembly, the People's Council, especially the question-and-answer sessions, are broadcast live on television and social media. Many programs featuring dialogues, debates, responses, and opinion polls - covering a wide range of issues - have been widely published, aired, and broadcast on radio and television. Through various forms of media, people are able to voice their opinions on issues that directly affect their lives - ranging from environmental protection, child and women's rights, and climate change to anti-corruption efforts and broader questions of social justice. The media has played a significant part in uncovering and reporting numerous legal violations, contributing to the fight against corruption, negative phenomena, and social evils, and in building a clean and strong public administration system. For instance, from 2016 to 2019, over 10,000 articles on anti-corruption were published across more than 40

national and local newspapers. In the first six months of 2022 alone, media outlets across the country published over 5,000 articles on corruption prevention and negative phenomena.

Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Viet Nam is a multi-religious country, with approximately 95% of the population engaging in religious or spiritual practices. This includes over 26.5 million followers of various religions, more than 54,000 religious leaders, over 135,000 religious workers, and nearly 30,000 places of worship.

We believe that Viet Nam has made significant strides in protecting the right to freedom of religion and belief. These advances are not only reflected in numbers or policy statements, but in the lived experiences of millions of people who are now better able to practice their faith, engage in spiritual life, and contribute to their communities through religious institutions.

The 2013 Constitution enshrines this right for all citizens, and the 2016 Law on Belief and Religion has laid a strong legal and institutional foundation for its protection and promotion. These legal instruments, applied consistently across the country, have simplified administrative processes and made it easier for both religious individuals and organizations to operate openly and lawfully.

As of 2023, Viet Nam recognizes 43 religious organizations representing 16 different faiths. More than 3,700 independent religious congregations have been officially registered for worship, including 67 groups formed by foreign nationals legally residing in the country. Major religions - such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao Buddhism - have established formal religious training institutions. Since the implementation of the law, new religious groups have also been granted official recognition or registration, including the Viet Nam Pentecostal Church, the Viet Nam Full Gospel Church, the Viet Nam United Evangelical Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Viet Nam.

Efforts to guarantee religious freedom have extended to vulnerable and often overlooked populations. In 54 detention centers, 17 religious titles comprising 4,418 copies have been made available in prison libraries, ensuring the right to spiritual access for incarcerated individuals. From 2018 to 2022, a total of 2,527 religious publications were printed, amounting to over 8.5 million copies. Notably, many of these were translated into English, French, and 13 minority languages, helping ensure inclusivity and accessibility for ethnic communities across the country. Furthermore, over 10,000 people each year participate in theological and doctrinal training courses organized by religious groups.

The organization and participation in religious festivals have traditionally been internal matters for religious communities and their followers, however, today many religious festivals have transcended places of worship and spread throughout society. Major religious holidays are now organized on an increasingly larger scale, attracting a large number of followers and citizens. On Buddha's Birthday, the Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha organizes solemn and peaceful ceremonies nationwide, drawing not only Buddhists but also a large number of citizens. Christmas, originally a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, has become widely popular in Viet Nam. The La Vang Pilgrimage Festival in Quang Tri Province attracts large numbers of both religious followers and tourists from within and outside the country.

Right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association

As a people's organization, we view the right to freedom of association as a vital component of democratic life. In Viet Nam, this right has been constitutionally recognized since the early days of national independence and is currently affirmed in Article 25 of the 2013 Constitution. We welcome the continuing legal and institutional efforts to strengthen this right and to facilitate citizen participation in public and community affairs.

Most notably, Decree No. 126/2024/NĐ-CP, issued in late 2024, replaces the previous Decree 45/2010/NĐ-CP and sets forth updated provisions on the organization, operation, and management of associations. This new decree is intended to better align with the 2013 Constitution and to facilitate the practical exercise of the right to association. We recognize this as a positive step toward modernizing the legal environment for civic organizations.

As of December 2022, Viet Nam had 71,669 officially registered associations. Among these, 587 operate nationwide or across multiple provinces, including 13 newly established in 2022, and 71,082 associations function at the provincial or municipal level.

Further legal safeguards are in place. The 2015 Penal Code criminalizes violations of the right to association and assembly, offering protection against unlawful interference. At the same time, relevant agencies are continuing to study potential amendments and improvements to association-related regulations, which we see as necessary to keep pace with social needs and international best practices.

For foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Decree No. 58/2022/NĐ-CP has brought greater clarity and efficiency to the legal process, including shortened processing times for registration and renewal, as well as strengthened financial transparency. This helps to foster a more enabling environment for

international civil society actors to contribute to Viet Nam's development and humanitarian efforts.

In addition, we highlight the significance of the 2022 Law on the implementation Grassroots Democracy, which gives legal effect to the principle: "*the people know, the people discuss, the people do, the people inspect, the people supervise, and the people benefit*". This law defines the roles and responsibilities of both citizens and authorities in fostering participatory governance at the local level. It is a strong institutional step toward ensuring that citizen voices are not only heard but actively integrated into public decision-making.

Recommendations:

Despite the above-mentioned achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights in Viet Nam, the Government of Viet Nam should consider the following measures to further promote civil and political rights, together with other socio-economical rights in the new rising era of Viet Nam.

- Continue investing in public healthcare and social protection systems to fully realize the right to life for all, especially vulnerable groups;
- Continue strengthening mechanisms for public access to information, particularly in the digital space, while promoting an open, inclusive, and safe media environment;
- Extend capacity building and livelihood support to the ethnic minority groups living in remoted areas.