

THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN VIETNAM

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Religion is historical social phenomenon at the same time it is an emotional problem in many historical stages of countries in the world. Normally, religions guide people to achieve good and human life. But religions take part in other levels in social life as health service, education, culture and politics.

The world is in the trend of globalization. The relations of many states are increasingly expanding on economic, political, social, cultural levels. Religion is also in common move of the world. The international activities of religions in the world are multiform and plentiful. In the process of existing and developing, many countries are interested in religion. The religious organizations interfere more obviously in economy, society, culture and political life of each country and of region. Many politicians are interested in the interference of religious organizations.

The international relations of religions are very multiform. They are activities on canon law and catechism; social charitable activities of individuals and religious organizations; participating international conferences and workshops, sending clerics and followers abroad to

study, taking part in religious training in Vietnam by foreign religious dignitaries and foreign believers .

We not only resolve the international relations of the religious organizations in accordance with the international regulations on religion but also care for the religious activities of foreign people. We should resolve these problems in accordance with real condition. We are also interested in Orthodox Church, Anglican Church which were propagated in Vietnam in the past but now they do not exist.

In many Congresses of Vietnamese Communist Party, our Party and State always have affirmed motto: “ *Vietnam is ready to be friend and reliable partner with countries in the international community, participating in the process of international and regional cooperation* ”

In fact, Vietnam has international relations with almost countries in the world. The international relations of religious organizations also expand on different fields in social life. So that the foreign activities must conformity with foreign line and policy of our Party and State and conformity with international general rule, among them there is international relations of religious organizations.

1- Vietnamese religious condition and real needs in international relations of religious organizations

Vietnam is a multi- religion and multi-belief nation. At present Vietnam has many different religions and religious organizations which were introduced into Vietnam many centuries ago as Buddhism, Catholicism,

Protestantism, Islam , Ba'hai. So religions themselves has some elements of international relations. Because of the need of spiritual life, some religions came into the world. They are Caodaim, Hòa Hảo Buddhism, Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, The Four Debts of Gratitude.

The religious organizations and religious sects, at various level, have certain international relations

Foreign affairs of religious organizations include : International exchange, participating in conferences and workshops; joining international and regional religious conferences, exchanging delegations with foreign organizations, sending dignitaries and believers abroad to study. Foreign delegations and religious organizations come Vietnam to take part in religious activities, the charitable activities of religious organizations

2- Some legal documents stipulate the international activities of religious organizations

At present, Vietnam takes part in to occlude 8 International Conventions, among them there is International Convention on “*Civic and Political Rights*”. The article 18 of this Convention stipulates that 1-“*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, belief and religion. This right includes freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom , either individually or in community with others and in public, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance*”

2- *“No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice”*

3- *“Freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health , or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others”*

4- *The States parties to the present Convention undertake to have respect for liberty of parents and when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions”*

When taking part in to conclude this Convention, Vietnam is ready to observe commitments. The foreign policy of our Party and State meets the need of international integration.,

President Hồ Chí Minh was interested in this problem as soon as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was founded. Article 3 of Decree 243/SL dated 14th June , 1955 stipulated: *“ Foreigners who are members of religious orders and who receive permission from the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam may preach, just like Vietnamese members of religious orders; they must abide by the laws of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam just like others foreigners”*

It can say that. Present Hồ Chí Minh realized that the problem of international relations of religion was an important and attentive problem

The 7th Congress of the Central Executive Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party (9th term) promulgated Resolution on *Religion Affairs* (Resolution no 25/TW dated on 12th march, 2003). Resolution deals with international and foreign relations of religions or regarding religions. These relations have to follow general policy and system of international and foreign relations in defence of national interests, holding national independence and sovereignty.

Ordinance on Belief and Religion no 21/2004/ PL- UBTVQH/11 dated on 18th June, 2004 of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly; Government Decree no 22/2005/NĐ-CP dated on 1st March, 2005 of the Government “ *On guidance for implementation of a number of Articles of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion*”; Instruction no 01/2005 CT-TTg dated on 4th February, 2005 of Prime Minister on “*Some Tasks regarding Protestantism*”. These documents show open policy of our Party and State and meet the needs of international relations of religious organizations.

Ordinance on Belief and Religion consists 6 chapters but chapter V stipulates: “International relation of religious organizations and followers, religious and dignitaries”. Articles 34,35,36,37 stipulate concretely on elements which relate to international relations of religions: religious organizations and dignitaries have right to carry out international activities, to take part in training courses abroad, to invite foreign dignitaries for preaching in Vietnam, create condition for religious activities of foreigners.

Chapter VI article 38 stipulates that *“In case where an international treaty concluded or acceded to, by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam contains a provision that contravenes a provision in this ordinance, the provision of the international treaty shall prevail”*. This article proves that the policy on religion and articles regarding international activities of religious organizations conformity with the international regulations on religion in general and on international relations of religions in particular.

3- International relations of religious organizations and religious sects in Vietnam.

State has defined its role for the management of international activities of religions: Vietnamese Church with respective Churches abroad, Church with international organizations related to religion, individuals and Vietnamese religious organization with foreign countries.

International relations of religions are resolved in accordance with international rule of International Conventions which are conclude by Vietnam as International Convent on Civic and Political rights (article 18)

The renovated views is determined to be necessary. Basing on it we correct some articles regarding international activities of religious organizations to improve the efficiency of State management over international activities of religions.

Religious organizations are created condition to enlarge international relations, take part in social activities, contribute in foreign front of people and diplomatic front of State when taking part in international religious organizations

Petitions and line are put forth to improve the efficiency of State management over international relations of religious organizations at present. All international activities of religious organization must abide by Vietnamese laws.

The forms of international relations of religious organizations

At present, we find that more and more international activities of religious organization take place at home and abroad. In international activities there are dignitaries, the researchers of religion of Vietnam. Many foreign dignitaries, organizations and individuals come Vietnam to take part in conference, workshops on religion and religious festivals.

International relations of religious organizations are generalized as follows:

- Some activities have been solely religious, such as visits and participation in workshops and international and regional conferences on religious doctrines, rites, regulations, religious activities...
- Social activities of individuals, religious organizations are considered as secular activities. Any religion can takes part in activities such as social activities, charitable activities, cultural

activities and activities for peace, development, social progress... are held by international organizations or United nation.

Workshops , Conferences on religion are held in our country with dignitaries, scholars, researchers on religion at home and abroad. For example Conference on “Religion and Rule of Law”, anniversary of 100 years of Protestantism in Vietnam

International relations of religions in Vietnam

Buddhism:

Buddhism has related to international religious organizations as Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace (ABCP), World Fellowship Buddhists (WFB), Indian Buddhism, Buddhist Association of China and World Buddhist Conference (WBC)

In May, 2008 Vietnam organized successful VESAK and made a strong impression on international friends. Many foreigners attend at this celebration.

Catholicism

Vietnamese Catholicism is connected with Vatican. Vatican delegations have exchanged 17 times with Vietnamese delegations. On 14th January, 2001, Pope Benedict 16 formally appointed Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli to be unpermanent representative of Holy See in Vietnam

From 18th April to 2nd May, 2001 Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli visited Vietnamese Catholic Church. From 4th to 9th June, 2001 Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli continued to visits some dioceses in Vietnam

Vietnamese Catholic Church has close relations with Catholic Association of France, Catholic Church of United States, and Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC).

Protestantism

The Christian and Missionary Alliance of America brought Protestantism to Vietnam in 1911 (at that time the first Protestant church was founded in Đà Nẵng). At present, Protestantism in Vietnam has two organizations: Vietnam General Protestant Church (Northern region) and Vietnam Federal Protestant Church (Southern region). Protestantism in Vietnam has relations with Protestantism in United States, in South Korea. Some American Protestant churches have relations with Protestantism in Vietnam as Baptist World Alliance, they have exchanged and visited each others.

In June, 2011 Protestant organizations in Vietnam hold the Anniversary 100 years of Protestantism in Vietnam Hanoi and in Đà Nẵng. Many representatives of United States, Canada and other countries take part in this celebration.

Islam

Islam was brought to Vietnam in 10th century. Comparing to other great religions as Buddhism, Catholicism, the number of Islamic followers makes up 1% population. Islam in Vietnam has two groups: Chăm Bà ni and Chăm Islam

Islamic community in Vietnam has on-going diverse relations with Islamic communities in Southeast Asia and particularly with Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, the World Union of Islamic Organizations, Islamic Development Bank...Many Islamic followers attend at reading Koran in Thailand, Malaysia..

Caodaism:

Caodaism has recently established relations with some foreign religious organizations such as “the Brother and Love for World Community” (OMOTO) of Japan. This organization visited Vietnam and had right and objective remark on religious policies in Vietnam

Foreign delegations come Vietnam to survey religious policies in Vietnam

Foreign delegations have not only worked with religious organizations but also met representative of government and related Government agencies to survey religious policies in Vietnam

In October, 1998 Abdelfattah Amor, special lecturer of United Nations met Government agencies and some dignitaries to survey religious policies in Vietnam.

The US President’s special envoys on international religious freedom was led by Robert Seiple visited and worked in Vietnam from 11th to 14th July, 1999

The Office of American Religious Freedom was led by John Hanford visited and worked in Vietnam in 2002, in 2003 and in 2005.

The Council of American Religious Freedom visited and worked in Vietnam in 2002.

In fact many foreign delegations and individuals come Vietnam.

We have not only created good conditions for foreign organizations and individuals to survey religious policies in Vietnam but also helped them to understand clearly religious activities in Vietnam.

The non-government organizations of foreign countries take part in giving aid to Vietnam

At present 700 more non-governments organizations of foreign countries (NGO) take part in giving aid to Vietnam. Among them there are 70 foreign non-government organizations which have had the origin of religion or related to religion to aid Vietnam. They take part in charitable activities and give assistance to health service, poverty – alleviation movements, development of community. At present, many religious organizations take part in charitable activities as NGO do in Vietnam

The religious activities of foreigners in Vietnam

In international meetings, ambassadors of some foreign countries propose our State to help foreigners to take part in religious activities. For example they want to rent place for their religious activities because some old places for religious activities are too narrow. The communities of South Korea Protestants in cities and provinces, the community of Russian orthodoxy in Vũng Tàu city and some religious communities have repeatedly proposed our Government to consider this problem

Through international relations of religious organizations we can say that one of many important characteristics of Vietnamese religions is multiform and broad international relations. So international exchange of religions is an indispensable need. Religions had have this need for long time. In general, international relations of Vietnamese religions have been established for long time. Nowadays international relations are increasingly strengthened and expanded.

In general, international relations of religious organizations aim at religious purpose such as participation in international workshops and conferences; exchange of religious doctrines, rites, regulations, religious activities...Almost religious organizations take part in social activities such as charitable activities, cultural activities, anti-war movements, poverty –alleviation movements which are held by United Nations or religious organization.

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The resolving of international relations of religious organizations is concerned deeply to meet the need of international exchange of religious organizations at the same time to create good conditions for religious organizations to participate in international workshops and conferences on religion, to take part in training course on religious doctrine ...

To carry out this duty will help foreign friends and dignitaries to understand more religious activities in Vietnam