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## A CALL TO PRAYER

“...please pray for us...” (II Thessalonians 3:1)

### TO: THE CHURCH OF GOD EVERYWHERE

Dear Children of God,

The Executive Board of The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) {ECV(S)} sends to all of you warmest greetings in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus.

During the 33 years since the Reunification, the ECV(S) has been tested and it has expanded, albeit in very difficult circumstances. In the spirit of Renovation the Vietnamese Government has promulgated the Ordinance on Belief and Religion. However, generally speaking, the Church is still restricted in many ways. In this letter, we would like to explain a few particular events so that you can join in praying with us.

#### 1. CHURCH BUILDINGS AND PREMISES:

According to the Constitution and the Ordinance, ‘...All religious premises are protected by law...’ However, in reality, the ECV(S) has experienced much pain and hurt since 1975. First of all, many buildings and properties of the Church have been confiscated, razed or seized and left abandoned; in particular, the Theological & Biblical Institute in Nha Trang, where many Christian leaders had been trained, was turned into a Trade Union Guest House in 1979.

After the ECV(S) received its full legal recognition in 2001, the Koho Bible School in Dalat and the Ede Bible School in Buon Me Thuot were completely demolished. The church building of the Cham people in Phuoc Dong was destroyed, as were many others. Therefore at the 44<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the ECV(S) in the Saigon Church in March 2005, a resolution was passed: ‘We unanimously request the Government of the Social Republic of Vietnam, to return the 217 religious premises of the ECV(S) that have previously been confiscated, including the Theological & Biblical Institute.’ It was passed unanimously. The list of confiscated properties was raised to 265 in 2007, and now includes all educational establishments of the ECV(S) that were confiscated and/or demolished.

For these reasons, the Executive Board of the ECV(S) has sent three petitions to the Government:

- \*Petition 1 on 10 Feb., 2007
- \*Petition 2 on 12 Aug., 2007
- \*Petition 3 on 10 Dec., 2007

Since the first petition was sent over a year ago, the Executive Board of the ECV(S) has received only one official reply, dated 27 of April, 2007 (reference 297/TGCP-TL), from the Government Bureau of Religious Affairs. A few small churches were returned to try to smooth over the situation. But after that, other sad things happened.

\*On 30 Nov. 2007, the Government permitted the demolition of Ben Cat Church in Binh Duong.

\*On 20 Dec. 2007, the Government permitted the demolition of Dong Tam Church, Go Vap District, Ho Chi Minh City. At that moment, The Executive Board of the ECV(S) sent a letter to the Ho Chi Minh City authorities asking them to reverse this mistaken decision. However, on the 26 Dec. 2007, The Dong Tam Church was completely destroyed right at the Christmas season. What a tearful *Christmas present* we were given!

## 2. INTERFERENCE INTO INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE CHURCH:

According to the Ordinance on Belief and Religion and a government decree: 'Ordination, transfer, and the designation of clergy need only to be registered 30 days in advance.' However, the real but invisible policy of 'asking permission' for everything is still being strongly applied. Although the ECV(S) has strictly complied with the new regulations it has still had to face much opposition.

In some local areas, the Government Bureau of Religious Affairs has interfered deeply in Church affairs, causing division and turmoil into Church activities (e.g., the transfer of the Senior Pastor within Binh Dinh province, the designation of the Senior Pastor to the Lu Gia Church, Ho Chi Minh City, the recognition of ECV(S) branches within Phu Yen province...). There are many sanctions in the Ordinance against violations by religions, but there are no provisions to penalize government officials who break the law.

## 3. PARTIALITY AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS:

On 25 Jan. 2007 and 15 Nov. 2007 in Tra Vinh, many Evangelical Christians were seriously injured for practicing faith in their premises, which they have tried to register according to Instruction 01 of the Prime Minister. While Evangelical Christians were praying at a private house in Ngu Lac village, a few Khmer Buddhist monks led an attack by a crowd of people, using sticks to seriously wound the pastor and the believers. There were witnesses from the local government, but these people only stood aside leaving the people of God to be beaten up ruthlessly by hundreds of people.

The Executive Board of ECV(S) sent 2 petitions, including photos and a report to local and central government authorities. Until this very day, the issue has not been resolved. The Executive Board has not received any reply.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In view of these circumstances, and considering the heavy responsibility given us by the 2005 General Assembly, we beseech you to join us in prayer and fasting... *'that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgiving, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity'* (I Timothy 2:1). For we believe that *'the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.'* (Proverbs 21:1).

In grace and peace,

THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM (South)  
THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

