

Vietnam, March 4, 2005

LETTER OF PROPOSAL

Subject: The desire of the Vietnamese Mennonite Church for freedom to exercise the right of religious freedom according to Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg dated 4/2/2005

To: His Excellency, Phan Van Khai, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRVN)

CC: His Excellency Nguyen Thanh Xuan, Deputy Director of the Central Government Bureau of Religious Affairs of the SRVN.
Ministry of Public Security of the SRVN
People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City
Bureau of Religious Affairs, HCM City
People's Committee of District 2, HCM City
People's Committee of Binh Khanh Ward, District 2, HCM City
Public Security Police of HCM City
Public Security Police of District 2, HCM City
Public Security Police of Binh Khanh Ward, District 2, HCM City

Dear Excellency, Prime Minister:

I am Evangelist Le Thi Phu Dung, the wife of the Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang now holding the position of the President of the Vietnamese Mennonite Church.

Dear Excellency, Prime Minister, the Mennonite Church is a church known around the world, and is currently active in more than 60 countries. Traditionally the church stands for and esteems peace, respects freedom and justice and contributes to a society that aspires to these things, and demonstrates the love and salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ to all people. The Mennonite Church was active and legally recognized in Vietnam before 1975. Since then the Mennonite Church has carried out many humanitarian and relief activities, a tradition of which we highly respect and continue to demonstrate. Currently there are in the Vietnamese Mennonite Church more than 10,000 believers.

Dear Excellency, Prime Minister, the freedom of belief and religion is a basic freedom of humanity and one which international law and the law of the State of Vietnam recognizes and accepts. However, throughout recent years and months our Vietnamese Mennonite community has met, as we have tried to practice our religious beliefs, very

many hardships and persecution at the hands of various levels of local authorities. The leaders of our church have sought every opportunity to explain to the local authorities the hardships and the restrictions and the persecution visited upon Mennonite believers by local authorities so that they might solve the problems in order that we might enjoy the freedom to practice our religion. But in truth, not only are the problems not solved and our aspirations to enjoy religious freedom denied, on the contrary, our Vietnamese Mennonite community has met with even more difficulties and persecution increases from the Central Highlands to the plains, from urban centres to rural villages.

On 4/2/2005 Your Excellency, Prime Minister issued Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg relating to a number of issues concerning the Protestant religion. The Instruction says:

***“Concerning the Protestant organizations which do not yet have the requirements according to law to be legally approved, if it is determined that there is truly a religious need, to guide the organization to properly register its activities with officials of the commune and ward. Then, step by step to examine the issue or giving legal status to the Protestant denominations that were here before 1975 and which are practicing orthodox religion. And if the requirements of the law are met, then to give permission to organize a General Assembly in order to grant legal recognition.*”**

On 7/2/2005 his excellency Nguyen Thanh Xuan, Deputy Director of the Central Government Bureau of Religious Affairs announced on Radio Free Asia that the Instruction of the Prime Minister would quickly be implemented at the local level.

Dear Excellency, Prime Minister!

Before the issuance of Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg on 4/2/2005, the Vietnamese Mennonite Church encountered many severe hardships at the hands of local officials. But after 4/2/2005 local officials continue to increase their persecution of our Mennonite community. For example at 1900 hours on 27/2/2005, 23 Christians who were praying at the headquarters of the Vietnamese Mennonite Church in District 2, were forcefully invaded by local government forces numbering some 50 police, security personnel, people’s committee members, and woman’s union members. They came in shouting and cursing, and broke up the prayer meeting, and used force to take the believers to the police station in Binh Khanh Ward of District 2. Our Mennonite believers were treated like criminals with two government officials manhandling each Christian aboard the police vehicle and hauling us to the police station. The police arrested me and 18 other believers and took us to the police station to interrogate us until 3:00 AM on the morning of 28/2/2005, ordering us believers never to go to the Mennonite headquarters to worship God again. We brought up Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg dated 4/2/2005 which gives us permission to freely worship God, and we asked the local officials to guide us as to how we could register our Protestant Christian activities according the Instruction issued by you, Prime Minister. The Public Security Police of Binh Khanh Ward, shouted angrily: *We police only follow the Ordinance on Religion of the National Assembly, and Instruction of the Prime Minister must be under the Ordinance. The Instruction of the*

Prime Minister may be applied in other places, but not in Binh Khanh Ward. We police have received orders from above to break up the Mennonites of District 2 and not to allow them to worship God because they are an organization that is not recognized. We asked the police of Binh Khanh Ward that since the Prime Minister was the head of the government, how was it possible that there was someone above the Prime Minister to issue such orders. The police answered: "We have written orders from on high . . . though there is an Instruction of the Prime Minister, it is in our authority as local officials to decide to grant it or not grant it."

Dear Excellency, Prime Minister, after the interrogation session with the public security police of Binh Khanh Ward on the night of 27/2/2005 there are several things which we do not understand and we hope that you will clear them up. Does Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg dated 4/2/2005 have validity in Binh Khanh Ward, District 2 in HCM City? Is it true that Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg dated 4/2/2005 applies to all Protestant communities except the Vietnamese Mennonite Church? Please inform us whether you, the Prime Minister, are the highest government authority in matters of the law, or is there yet a higher authority in matters of the law? Why is it that the public security police of Binh Khanh Ward act in accordance with written orders of some higher authority or other and do not follow the Instruction of the Prime Minister? Please advise us what body was it that issued the written orders for the police of Binh Khanh Ward to disband our worship?

Your Excellency, Prime Minister, we welcome the spirit of Instruction 01/2005 CT-TTg dated 4/2/2005 because of its inclination to provide the conditions for Protestant denominations which do not yet have legal recognition to be able to register their activities with local authorities. We sincerely hope that the Instruction will be applied in reality.

On behalf of more than 10,000 Vietnamese Mennonite believers, we propose to you, Prime Minister and to the Central Government Bureau of Religious Affairs our aspirations as follows:

1. Guide us in a written document, in detail, on exactly what steps the Vietnamese Mennonite Church must take, what papers it must submit to register, according to the spirit of Instruction 01/2005 CT-TTG dated 4/2/2005 because the Vietnamese Mennonite Church has been active in Vietnam since before 1975.
2. While we are waiting for this guidance to register for legal recognition, I request that Your Excellency, Prime Minister, to please guide local authorities of various levels to respect religious freedom, particularly of the Vietnamese Mennonite community. Allow the Vietnamese Mennonite Church in all localities to openly register their activities with local authorities according to the spirit of Instruction 01/2005 CT-TTG dated 4/2/2005.
3. I respectfully request that Your Excellency, Prime Minister, guide the various levels of local officials to return the property unjustly confiscated from the Vietnamese Mennonite Church since 1975.

4. I respectfully request that Your Excellency, Prime Minister will take measures in reference to local government cadres who abuse their positions and power to oppress and persecute religious communities and act against the policies of Instruction 01/2005 CT-TTG dated 4/2/2005.

Dear Excellency, Prime Minister, on behalf of the Vietnamese Mennonite Church's more than 10,000 believers, I express our sincere desire to see justice respected in the way the State is governed, and at the same time to receive some good will from government authorities of various levels in returning peace and stability for religious activities in Vietnam in the spirit of the Instruction which Your Excellency issued on 4/2/2005.

We sincerely hope that Your Excellency, Prime Minister, will address our proposals herein. We sincerely thank you, Your Excellency, Prime Minister.

On behalf of the Vietnamese Mennonite Church
Acting President

X –signed

Evangelist Le Thi Phu Dung
(that is Mrs. Nguyen Hong Quang)