

Mennonite evangelists imprisoned in Vietnam: Targeted by authorities for months

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More than two months after their arrest, three evangelists and a staff member of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam remain imprisoned, their status unknown. The four were arrested in Ho Chi Minh City on March 2. An April 1 letter signed by 13 church leaders and sent to the prime minister and ministry of public security decried the “evil actions” of the police “in beating, imprisoning and refusing to allow the church to visit [the prisoners].”

The letter also speaks of “many other brothers and sisters who have disappeared whose whereabouts we do not know.” Vietnamese Mennonites have been targeted by authorities for months. In January a church building was demolished and the property confiscated, and church members have had their property confiscated.

Other church leaders and members have been beaten and intimidated; one 80-year-old was arrested for viewing the film *Jesus* and ordered not to have any contact with the local pastor. Church members claim they are being falsely accused of being reactionaries, American lackeys and opponents of the government.

At an April 25 worship service, police recorded participants’ license numbers, and two were heavily fined for traffic violations, including “blowing the horn loudly.” “Though our Mennonite groups have not violated the law . . . everywhere the Mennonite believers are terrorized and pursued, creating an unprecedented tense and sad situation,” the church’s executive committee wrote in another letter a month earlier. Church leaders said also that some abuses stem from ethnic conflicts.

The Mennonite World Conference, the global Mennonite fellowship, has sent a letter of concern to Vietnamese officials and requested a meeting with them to discuss the situation. The Mennonite Church in Vietnam has more than 1,000 members in 26 congregations. *-Religion News Service*