



**Human Rights Watch Statement
UPR Outcome Report of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
September 24, 2009**

Mr. President,

Today's final Outcome Report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Vietnam raises serious doubts about Vietnam's commitment to human rights protection.

The government of Vietnam has rejected significant recommendations by UN member states during the UPR process pertaining to arbitrary detention and mistreatment of government critics, democracy advocates, members of unsanctioned religious groups, and human rights defenders; restrictions on freedom of peaceful expression, association, and religion; use of capital punishment; and lack of prohibitions of torture.

Among the 45 recommendations from member states rejected by Vietnam were recommendations to lift internet and blogging controls and prohibitions on privately-owned media; allow groups and individuals to promote human rights, express their opinions and publicly dissent; expedite local registration of religious organizations and equitable resolution of religious property disputes; take steps to abolish the death penalty; repeal or amend national security laws used to criminalize peaceful dissent, and release peaceful prisoners of conscience.

In addition, Vietnam refused to make a commitment to issue invitations to all UN special procedures, none of which have visited Vietnam since 1998, including the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the special rapporteurs on freedom of expression, violence against women, and torture.

While Vietnam's outcome report lists a number of recommendations accepted by the Vietnamese government, most of them are broad statements of intent, with Vietnam agreeing only to "consider ratifying or acceding to" various international conventions, while refusing to recognize existing violations or initiate effective remedies for such violations.

Nonetheless, on the positive side, since Vietnam's interactive UPR dialogue in Geneva in May, it has reduced the number of crimes punishable by capital punishment.

Mr. President, it is disturbing that, throughout the review, the Vietnamese government has blatantly denied its persecution, imprisonment, and mistreatment of hundreds of political and religious prisoners and therefore maintained it is not an issue warranting a serious response.

In fact, during the four months since Vietnam's interactive dialogue on UPR, Vietnam has arrested at least seven peaceful democracy activists and more than 30 Montagnard Christians belonging to independent house churches. Since May, nine Montagnard Christians have been sentenced to prison; another eight democracy activists await trial this month.

The outcome report contains assertions by the Vietnamese government in defense of its rights record that contradict abundant documentation by UN mechanisms and international rights organizations of Vietnam's rights abuses.

Despite numerous states expressing concern about arbitrary detention and imprisonment of people for peaceful religious or political activities, mistreatment of ethnic minorities, religious freedom violations, and abuses in prisons and administrative detention facilities, Vietnam's responses were disturbingly inadequate.

Against abundant evidence Vietnam asserted in the final report that it has no "so-called 'prisoners of conscience'; no one is arrested for criticizing the government, only for violating Vietnam's laws; its national security laws conform to international law; and "there is no practice of torture or degrading treatment of law offenders and those under detention for investigative purposes."

Vietnam also claimed to have already implemented – or to be in the process of implementing - recommended measures to ensure full respect of freedom of religion and prevent violence and discrimination against ethnic minorities.

Mr. President, Vietnam's UPR Outcome Report clearly reveals a strategy of obfuscation and denial, rather than a genuine commitment to protecting and promoting human rights.