

Plum Village, Dec 15, 2009

## Dear friends

Please forgive me for disturbing you during this holy season of family and homecoming. But our Bat Nha monks and nuns are now in a position not unlike Mary and her baby Jesus -- they do not know where to take shelter, to practice and be together in safety. For more than three years, our 379 monastics lived and practiced undisturbed in our Bat Nha (Prajna) Monastery in Vietnam, on land owned by Abbot Thich Duc Nghi and offered to us. Since then, many buildings including a huge Meditation Hall, four nuns' residences and three monks' residences were built using thousands of contributions from generous donors around the world, including some of you. Despite our having plenty of evidence of our owning these buildings, under governmental pressure the Abbot Duc Nghi withdrew his support for us and ordered us to leave our own monastery. For fourteen months, our pleas for help to reverse this illegal action went unanswered.

As the situation has gone from bad to worse, our 379 very young monks and nuns have undergone a kind of baptism by fire, and have achieved a great success in training to understand, accept, and have genuine compassion for those who abuse them. Over the past several months they have been verbally assaulted over loudspeakers 24 hours a day and threatened with being bludgeoned to death. Policemen came demanding the monastics' identification every night from 7 pm to 11.30 pm, and cut off their electricity and water for three months.

Then, hired mobs arrived on the stormy night of September 27, 2009 to forcibly and violently eject 147 monks, smash doors and windows and torment the 232 nuns. They all escaped and sought shelter at Phuoc Hue temple. At Phuoc Hue, the monks and nuns continue to be harassed, and the most compassionate and elderly abbot of that temple, after much resistance, also has been violently forced to sign a letter evicting our monastics. As of December 31, 2009, these brothers and sisters will have absolutely no place to go, and in fact may be drafted by the government into the armed forces. Even if they return to their familial homes, the harassment is unlikely to cease unless and until they disrobe and abandon their monastic life completely.

**NOW** is the most crucial moment for our monks and nuns. Please quickly go to www.thepetitionsite.com/6/religious-freedom-in-viet-nam, sign the petition. This is the second one, not the one you signed in August 2009. Please sign and write to five friends asking them to sign, to achieve the greatest number we could before December 31, 2009. You have come through for me, for us, many times before. I know I can count on you in this, our hour of greatest need.

With all our most heartfelt blessings and wishes of peace to you,

Sister Chân không sends you her day appreciation for your longlasting friendship.