H.E. Truong Tan Sang, President, Socialist Republic of Vietnam
H.E. Nguyen Tan Dung, Prime Minister
H.E. Nguyen Phu Trong, Secretary General, Communist Party of Vietnam
H.E. Nguyen Sinh Hung, President of the National Assembly

Paris, 5 May 2014

Excellencies,

From 7-11 May 2014, your government will host the 2014 United Nations’ Day of the Vesak at the Bai Dinh Temple in Ninh Binh province. This sacred festival, which commemorates the Buddha’s Birth, Enlightenment and Passing Away, is a world-recognized religious and cultural event. It should be a joyful occasion, a day to remember Buddha’s message of tolerance and peace, and to inspire all people, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, to work together towards mutual understanding and harmonious coexistence in our world.

However, we are deeply disturbed by recent reports of grave repression against Buddhism, the very faith you claim to celebrate. Only the State-sponsored Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, controlled by the Communist Party’s Fatherland Front, is involved in these celebrations, whilst the independent, historical Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) remains banned and its leaders are prisoners in their own pagodas.

Today, the UBCV’s Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do, aged 86, a renowned scholar and 2014 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, is under house arrest at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Ho Chi Minh City. He has spent more than three decades in detention for his peaceful advocacy of religious freedom and human rights. UBCV monks, nuns and lay-followers in twenty provincial sections all over the country are routinely harassed, and Security Police are preventing celebrations of the Vesak in many UBCV temples in Danang, Hue and elsewhere. Moreover, in the light of grave abuses against Buddhists, Protestants, Catholics, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and other religious communities, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended in its latest report that Vietnam be re-designated as a “Country of Particular Concern”.

We appreciate the progress Vietnam has made in the economic domain, but we believe that progress is only sustainable if it is built upon tolerance and respect. Vietnam is a member of the UN Human Rights Council and a signatory to key UN human rights treaties. As such, your government has a binding obligation to uphold human rights, including the universal and inalienable right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

We call upon you to mark this 2014 UN Day of Vesak by ceasing all repression against the UBCV, releasing Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do and restoring the UBCV’s legitimate status. By this gesture, you will uphold the noble aims enshrined in the UN Vesak Day Charter, and honour the 2,000 year heritage of Buddhism in Vietnam.

Sincerely,