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VIETNAMESE CIVIL SOCIETIES DEMAND REFORMS, FREE AND FAIR ELECTION

(Hanoi, Vietnam, August 13, 2023) --- On August 13, 2023, seven civil society groups, including the Group for the Establishment of Civil Rights, Civil Society Forum, Independent Literary Union Campaign Committee, Vietnam Bauxite Forum, Phan Tay Ho Club, Nguyen Trong Vinh Club, and Le Hieu Dang Club; as well as more than 30 notables, signed a petition urgently demanding “drastic reforms” in Vietnam’s institutions and free and fair elections for the People’s Councils at all levels.

The petition alleged that since 1975 the Vietnamese authorities have made repeated changes in the country’s administrative units, causing confusion, upheaval, and waste, as well as leaving negative long-term consequences. These administrative changes have incurred great financial and even psychological toll on the people. Many proposed mergers risk erasing historically important landmarks which have sacred meaning in the history, cultural traditions and spiritual life of the Vietnamese people.

The requested reforms included abolishing the “incestuous” policy of selecting unqualified people within the Communist Party, or more specifically, of special interest groups, and replacing it with an open and transparent system of electing capable officials, regardless of background or Party affiliation. In addition to the call to streamline the burdensome administration, the petition also called into question membership and funding of the so-called Fatherland Front.

Specifically, the signatories called for an electoral system where people are free to vote and run for office at all local levels. A recent publication of a Free and Fair Election Scorecard gave Vietnam a low score of 27 out of 100 possible points,

based on criteria by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Vietnam, a one-party state, has been consistently categorized as “not free” and “authoritarian” by many international organizations and governments.

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