

## Catholics and Buddhists helping ex-soldiers in Saigon amid the COVID-19 outbreak

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Former South Vietnamese soldiers are among the most marginalised people in Vietnam today. The restrictions imposed because of the coronavirus pandemic have broken the chain of aid. A Buddhist organised an overseas fundraiser, and the money was given to Redemptorist Fathers to help almost 1,200 needy people.



Ho Chi Minh City (AsiaNews) – Catholics and Buddhists have joined forces during the ongoing pandemic making it possible to bring help and comfort to ex-soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam, who are among the most isolated and marginalised people by Vietnam’s Communist regime.

These veterans number in the thousands. In normal circumstances, they have to struggle to find the means to survive (materially and spiritually). With the emergency caused by the novel coronavirus, they have been pushed even further into the margins of society.

The veterans are from different southern provinces, like Bến Tre, Anh Giang, Cần Thơ and Bình Dương. During the Vietnam War (1960-1975), they fought for the US-backed Republic of Vietnam (or South Vietnam), but lost when the North Vietnamese army reunited the country.

Since then, the Communist regime has done very little for them. Because of the war, many have suffered serious battle injuries and are unable to earn a living. As a result, they are forced to beg.

First a Buddhist group, then the Redemptorist Fathers in Saigon, have been caring for these marginalised men, around 1,400 in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) alone.

However, COVID-19 has stopped the flow of aid and the rules introduced to combat the spread of the virus have further isolated the veterans.

Reacting to the emergency, Trương Quốc Huy, a Buddhist, mobilised the Vietnamese community living in the United States at the end of April, raising US\$ 60,000 to donate to priests "to care for war veterans," as the Redemptorist Superior, Fr Giuse (Joseph) Hồ Đắc Tâm, notes.

"After discussing it in depth, we worked out an agreement with Trương Quốc Huy to bring aid to the wounded soldiers," said the clergyman. "This is not an insignificant sum of money, even if the veterans are many "and help is never enough. "For this reason, we have decided to limit the distribution work to the Saigon area."

However, the money transfer was initially held up, and only after a month, on 26 May, did the Redemptorists in Cần Giờ district receive it to start their aid campaign.

Recently, Trương Quốc Huy said on his TV channel that collaboration between Buddhists and Christians turned "an act of solidarity" into concrete action, thanks to Fr Joseph's precious work.

The distribution of aid by priests and volunteers will continue until next Sunday, to benefit 1,181 veterans in 24 Ho Chi Minh City districts.

This "act of love" was made possible by Christians and Buddhists working together, with the crucial contribution of Vietnamese living in the United States who gave money through Trương Quốc Huy.