Kok Ksor and the Struggle for Montagnard Autonomy and Human Rights in Indochina

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Abstract

 During the Vietnam War another conflict existed alongside the war against North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong). This was the Central Highlanders struggle for their cultural and political autonomy from the majority Vietnamese (*Kinh)* nation. The two dozen ethnic groups and some thirty tribes that constituted the Degar peoples of the highlands, better known as the Montagnards, allied themselves with the Americans early in U.S. involvement. Many of the tribesmen worked with U.S. forces in various military capacities, including CIDG and FULRO; others simply were caught in the middle of the warfare that devastated their villages and lives. The Montagnards suffered heavy costs, and the U.S. abandoned them when it departed. This study looks at the Degar’s ongoing battle against persecution and cultural annihilation. The story of the Montagnards plight in Indochina and as refugees in the United States is told through the life of one of the longest serving and most important Montagnard leaders—the warrior turned international human rights spokesman Kok Ksor, founder of the Montagnard Foundation. Driven by his Montagnard pride and passion and his commitment to his religious faith, Ksor devoted his life to the cause. Although little known today, he was an important figure. The Montagnards remain neglected people fighting for their very existence, their culture, their land, and their religion against powerful Vietnamese forces to assimilate them under communism and the dominant *Kinh* society. The small refugee remnant in the United States is also little recognized.

Introduction

 The Indochina Wars from the end of World War II through, it can be argued, the present day were multi-sided and involved a multifarious complex of peoples and ethnicities, each with their own objectives. During the so-called Second Indochina War, the major theater in Vietnam included the three political entities—Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN or North Vietnam), Republic of Vietnam (RVN or South Vietnam), and the National Liberation Front (or Viet Cong). The conflicts in Laos and Cambodia brought various ethnic and political groups in those countries into the interrelated mix. Much has been written on the Lao, Hmong, Cambodians, and Khmer Rouge. But another constituency deserves much larger treatment. The peoples of the Central Highlands of South Vietnam, known popularly as the Montagnards, are another entity. The Central Highlanders considered themselves autonomous from the Republic of Vietnam, and the RVN considered the highlanders outliers from the Vietnamese (*Kinh*). The Americans in Vietnam, who early in the war allied with the Montagnards, found themselves in the conflict between the Central Highlanders and the South Vietnamese government. When the United States left Vietnam in the mid-1970s, it abandoned its Montagnard allies. But the war did not end for the Montagnards who continue to suffer from discrimination, persecution, and cultural emasculation.

 Today a small remnant of Montagnard refugees reside in the United States, mostly in North Carolina, where around 12,000, are located primarily around Greensboro, Raleigh, and Charlotte. Many Montagnards today have taken an identity as the Dega (people of the mountains) or Degar (all peoples of the mountains) which emphasizes a common culture despite significant tribal and ethnic differences. The Montagnards were not the only abandoned allies. The U.S. also deserted the Hmong people of Laos, who have a larger refugee population in the United States, approximately 260,000, primarily in California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and 11,000 in North Carolina. Their saga nationally has been more extensively told.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Degar’s story has not.

 The Montagnards are comprised of approximately two dozen ethnic minorities and some thirty tribes (depending on methodology of classification, different numbers exist) who inhabit four provinces that cover a large swath in Vietnam known as the Central Highlands. The peoples have distinct origins, languages, linguistic backgrounds (basically from either Mon-Khmer or Austronesian-Malayo-Polynesian language groups), and cultures; and many lived in their individual villages and communities almost totally isolated from larger society, where they followed thousand-year’s old traditional patterns of agriculture, governance, and social life. The French colonial regime lumped the different ingenious ethnic peoples of the Central Highlands together as the Montagnards (mountain dwellers), and when the Americans arrived they picked up the term. The Vietnamese people of the coastal and lowland areas are a mixed racial people but refer to themselves as *Kinh* to establish their difference between themselves and the tribal highlanders. Today *Kinh* constitute 87% of Vietnam’s population among the country 54 officially-designated ethnic peoples.[[2]](#footnote-2)

 During the years of America’s involvement in the war, the collective Degar peoples were estimated to be around a million although no agreed figures exist. An estimated 200,000-220,000 died during the war, and the peoples have suffered grievously since. A small group of refugees made their way to the United States in two waves in 1988 and 1992 (with another 900 arriving in 2002), and as indicated above, were resettled in North Carolina. The refugees formed organizations in the late 1980s. Most of these organizations concentrate on resettlement, maintaining Montagnard culture, and the integration of families and peoples into American society.[[3]](#footnote-3)

 The Montagnard story can be told through various windows and personages, but the focus here will be on one of the primary figures of the refugee experience, former warrior turned human rights activist, Kok Ksor, the founder of the Montagnard Foundation, Inc. (officially the Degar Foundation, Inc.) in 1990. More than most of the other Degar groups, Ksor concentrated on the ongoing plight and persecution of Montagnards in the Central Highlands, especially religious freedom.

 Up until the moment of his death in January 2019, Kok Ksor was an individual of unique commitment, dedication, and talent with one of the longest and most varied histories of Montagnard activism. A former soldier and political activist, and later a minister and international human rights, Ksor was a voice of conscience attempting to call international attention to the ongoing plight of one of the forgotten, abused, and neglected peoples of the globe. He was a deeply religious man, at heart a pastor above all else, whose Christianity was the core of his existence. From award-winning bravery under fire in combat, he became a quiet man of humanity, humility, dignity, and non-violence. Ksor did not wish for and has not garnered the attention that his life and work deserves.

Brief History of the Montagnards Struggle for Autonomy

 When the French came into the area in the late nineteenth century, they made agreements with existing Montagnard tribal leaders to allow them local autonomy, although the French exploited the peoples for their own less-than-noble purposes. The French formally assumed control over the Central Highlands in 1893, and the infrastructure that they introduced, such as roads, were for the French to support their investments in lumber, coffee and rubber plantations. In 1946, the French created a special status for the highlands, the *Pays Montagnard du Sud-Indochinois*, separate from the Vietnamese Annam state in central Vietnam. This was to counter Ho Chi Minh’s move to incorporate the highlands in his proclaimed Democratic Republic of Vietnam, declared in September 1945. Consistent with their practices in the other parts of their colonial areas, the French provided schools for a limited number of highlands people, who then became an elite that the French employed to serve them administratively.

 The Franco-Vietnamese War, 1946-1954, in Montagnard territory affected the inhabitants lives. Although some Montagnards sided with Ho and the communists during and after the war, most preferred the French. Both the French and Ho promised autonomy, but the role of Christianity among the Montagnards was important. Catholics had made inroads into the area in the 19th century, but it was evangelical Protestants who focused on the area who would determine the longer term allegiance of the Montagnards, especially after the withdrawal of the French.

 Problems for the highland minorities increased dramatically after the French departed. The new South Vietnamese government first under Emperor Bao Dai and then the Republic of Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem had designs on Montagnard territory. Bao Dai envisioned the highlands as a separate private preserve, called the Crown Dominion, were he loved to hunt and camp. He had good relations with the various tribal chiefs and he was more open to their autonomy.

 Diem followed a policy that all others in the ensuing decades, especially the communists later, would pursue--cultural assimilation. To build a nation, minority cultures must be subordinated to a common nationalism and national development strategy. As early as 1956, Diem began to confiscate Montagnard lands and support lowland Vietnamese efforts “to develop” the region. When the Second Indochina War between North Vietnam and South Vietnam (and the Americans) ensued, the Montagnards found themselves in the center of a major combat theater. The Ho Chi Minh Trail ran through Montagnard land, and throughout the war the North Vietnamese envisioned taking over the highlands and splitting South Vietnam in two. The tribes could not escape the conflict. The ethnic Vietnamese (*Kinh*), whether in the North or the South, considered the indigenous peoples as inferiors, whom they referred to as *moi* (savages) and they had no problem with exploiting them. From the earliest days, the communists used some of them as *corvee*, or more appropriately, slave labor porters, and treatment by the South Vietnamese was little better.[[4]](#footnote-4)

 In May 1958 a French-educated civil servant from the Rhade tribe, Y Bham Enuol (Rhade male names usually employ the initial Y, which can be loosely interpreted as “Mr.”) and several other intellectuals established Bajaraka (the name a composition of the Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade, and Koho—the four main ethnic tribes), an organization which sought autonomy for the minorities in the Central Highlands. Bajaraka condemned the racial discrimination against the tribes and called for France, the United States, and the United Nations to intervene to secure independence for the minority peoples of the region. In August and September 1958, Bajaraka led demonstrations in support of its cause in Kontum, Pleiku, and Bon Ma Thuột. These were quickly suppressed and the leaders jailed.

 Beginning in 1961, U.S. Special Forces, the “Green Berets,” dispatched to Vietnam as advisers against the communist threat from the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, began working with the Montagnards in the Central Highlands. The Americans organized Montagnards into the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) and provided training and weapons to fight the communists.[[5]](#footnote-5) Diem was quite concerned about the arming of the highlanders since he did not consider them as part of the Vietnamese (*Kinh*) sense of a nation, and he foresaw longer term conflict with them. With the fall of Diem in November 1963, the new South Vietnamese leaders made overtures to the minority peoples. Bajaraka leaders were released from jail and some were given political positions. However, the sense that the highlanders were not really part of the Vietnamese nation remained strong on both sides throughout the war.

 The U.S. was instrumental in bringing together the Montagnards and other ethnic minorities into the Central Highlands Defense Force in 1964. In the same year, a wider ethnic alliance, headquartered in Cambodia, *Front uni de lutte des races opprimées* (United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races), known by the acronym from the French, FULRO, also emerged. In September 1964 the so-called Montagnard Revolt against the South Vietnamese government and U.S. Special Forces at several camps brought FULRO into prominence. The origins of the revolt were Vietnamese contempt for the Montagnard forces and FULRO’s assertion that the Vietnamese were stealing Montagnard land. Dissident FULRO forces took hostages at one camp, Vietnamese Special Forces were killed, and Montagnard Strike Force members threatened to march on Ban Me Thuot. South Vietnamese premier General Nguyen Khanh blamed the Americans for arming the Montagnards in the first place. Several South Vietnamese generals then and afterward openly expressed racist condescension toward the Montagnards as children that needed to be managed.

 A negotiation finally brought an end to the revolt, but FULRO leader Y Bham Enuol and 2000 followers, primarily Strike Forces personnel who had participated in the revolt, moved to Cambodia and established a headquarters at Mondolkiri, which would remain the center of the organization through the rest of the 1960s. After Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu seized power in a coup in 1965, relations between FULRO and the South Vietnam government improved some. Six highlanders were elected to the National Assembly and an ethnic Bahnar was named as a Cabinet officer responsible for the minorities. However, a FULRO rebellion erupted in December 1965 over the Vietnamese failure to fulfill agreements made in 1964. A FULRO attack in one district killed 35 Vietnamese. Enoul considered returning to Vietnam to lead the revolt, but did not. He did emphasize that Americans were not to be harmed. The revolt was crushed with four leaders executed and fifteen others imprisoned. In October 1966 some FULRO returned to Vietnam, and in December 1968 Enoul concluded an agreement with the Republic of Vietnam for others to repatriate. In January 1969, 1300 FULRO officers and families returned to Vietnam; however Cambodian ruler Norodom Sihanouk restrained Enoul under house arrest in Cambodia, where he remained until his death six years later at the hands of the Khmer Rouge.[[6]](#footnote-6)

 FULRO split into factions, some aligned with the U.S. and South Vietnam, others with the North Vietnamese. Estimates of some 40,000 Montagnards served with the United States military forces during the span of the war primarily as scouts, interpreters, and Mobile Strike Forces (MIKE) combatants under the CIDG and/or FULRO. Famed anthropologist of the region Gerald C. Hickey stated that by the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 approximately 85% of highlanders were forced from their villages which were destroyed or in ruins. He states that for at least three of the tribes—the Bru, Pacoh, and Katu—not one house remained standing. He also estimated that 200,000-220,000 lost their lives during the war and the rest were refugees.[[7]](#footnote-7)

 Things got even worse for the Montagnards after the communist victory. Just as the Republic of Vietnam had done in earlier decades, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam’s quest for a unified national culture, now under socialist development, provided the justification for abolishing “the inefficient practices and divisive nature of Montagnard cultures and placing these nomadic peoples in stable settlements.” As Hickey characterized it, the Communists

…brought to bear the same mix of Vietnamese ethnocentrism and chauvinism as the Saigon governments, but now they added the Marxist-Leninist perspective which depreciated the highland people as “primitive” (in the worst sense), their rites of passage as “backward.” And their religious beliefs and practices as “superstitions”. This lead to the worst oppression the surviving highlanders have ever experienced. It also has contributed to wanton destruction of the highland physical environment.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Ethnic Vietnamese (*Kinh*) were brought into the highlands and the original inhabitants relocated to the valleys to grow rice and other crops for use outside the area. Those identified with past involvement with U.S. forces were sent to re-education camps.

 Some of the highlanders escaped to the forest and organized a guerilla movement, this time against Hanoi. In Cambodia an uneasy alliance between FULRO and the Khmer Rouge against the Vietnamese emerged. The Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979, drove the Khmer Rouge out of power in Phnom Penh, and established a puppet government in the country; but elements of the Khmer Rouge survived as guerillas in the countryside. They made common cause with FULRO, where some 7000 FULRO forces operating out of their base in Mondolkiri conducted military raids across the border against Vietnamese forces. However in 1986 the Khmer Rouge cut off support to FULRO.

 Some FULRO fled into the jungles and continued their fight, many perished, and a few ended up in refugee camps in Thailand. With the intervention of a couple of former American Special Forces personnel, 212 FULRO fighters and their families were relocated from Thailand to the United States as refugees in 1988. A remnant continued to operate deep in the jungle in five small riverine villages in northeastern Cambodia surviving under extreme deprivation without contact with the outside world. Discovered by chance by the peacekeeping UN Transitional Authority Cambodia (UNTAC) forces, journalist Nate Thayer made his way to the hidden camp in September 1992. When the insurgents asked about their leader Y Bham Enuol, they were informed that he had been executed 17 years earlier. The famed UN diplomat Sergio Vieira de Mello, who spent his career handling such situations, made an incognito visit to the Montagnards, where he negotiated the ending of hostilities, surrender of their 144 old AK-47 rifles and 2557 rounds of ammunition, and lowering their flag. They gave the flag to Vieira de Mello, who hung it in his office in Geneva.[[9]](#footnote-9)

 The 417 fighters and families received asylum in the United States. The connection with Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, home of the Special Forces and Green Beret veterans who had worked with Montagnards in early years, played a key role in the North Carolina settlement of both of the last groups of the FULRO. Several Special Forces veterans continued to be sponsors for the refugees.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Kok Ksor’s Early Life

 Ksor, a member of the Jarai tribe, was born in 1944 in Bon Broai village, Cheo Reo district, in the present-day Gia Lai province of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. He joined the Bajaraka movement in 1958 as a boy, and three years later in 1961, he put his studies as a secondary student in Ban Me Thuot on hold to go with his uncle, Ksor Dun, a leading Bajaraka activist, to Cambodia. He joined FULRO in 1964 following the Montagnard Revolt. Dispatched as FULRO’s representative in his native Cheo Reo-Pleiku region, Ksor survived Viet Cong attacks several times as he made trips into Vietnam to carry messages from FULRO to Ban Me Thuot.

 While in school in Ban Me Thuot, Kok met a young girl, H’li Nie Hrah, the sister of the important Rhade Protestant minister Y Ham Nie Hrah. H’li was an exceptional young woman who fell in love with Kok while still very young. When she turned 18, she decided to go to Cambodia to find him. Along with two other young women who had boyfriends in Cambodia, and with the help of numerous guides along the way, she set out on the perilous trip. Arriving on an elephant, H’li found Kok in a secret FULRO camp deep in the jungle in the northeastern part of the country. The couple were married the next day, but Kok soon had to leave to return to his recruitment and training work in Vietnam.[[11]](#footnote-11)

 As a young man, Kok was one of FULRO’s legendary warriors. Don Bendell’s *Snake-Eater*, a breathless, sensationalized account that must be taken with circumspection, recounts some of these harrowing events.[[12]](#footnote-12)Moving back and forth between Cambodia and Vietnam, Kok served first as an interpreter and then in several combat roles at different times with American units, including the 4th Infantry Division in Pleiku and the Fifth Special Forces. He was wounded in battle, awarded the Purple Heart, and captured by the NVA in a firefight defending H’Li’s village near Ban Me Thuot during Tet 68. He escaped being summarily executed on the spot as some of his comrades were, but he was held as a POW for several months before miraculously being released.

 After this, Kok held several brief jobs while continuing his primary function of recruitment and training for FULRO. He worked for a time as a bartender in an NCO Club in Ban Me Thuot, did maintenance work for Pacific Architects and Engineers, and was an interpreter for USAID. The South Vietnamese considered FULRO and Ksor as threats and both the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese sought to kill him. Despite Bendall’s hyperbolizing, no question exists that Kok was a tough warrior who saw his share of combat and dangerous escapes. His Montagnard identity and his passionate Christianity were the hallmarks of Kok’s being. In combat and afterwards, he constantly proclaimed that God’s intervention saved his life many times, which he believed was for a larger purpose that God had planned for him.

 After General Lon Nol’s coup in Cambodia in 1970, Ksor and several other Montagnards received commissions in the Cambodian Army. Kok moved H’Li and their three sons at the time from Mondolkiri to apartments along the Boulevard Monivong in Phnom Penh where along with the other Montagnard officers they resided across from a military base. As he departed for continuing operations, Kok told H’Li that when he could he would return for the family. In the next years, Kok was in and out of Cambodia and Vietnam, and Lon Nol sent him for U.S. military training three times between 1971 and 1975, including to the U.S. Intelligence Officers School in Okinawa (Japan) and Transportation Officer Training at Ft. Eustis, Virginia. In 1974

Y Bham Enoul appointed him FULRO chief of staff. Ksor and another Montagnard officer in the Cambodian army were in the U.S. when the Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh in April 1975. They executed Enoul and other FULRO leaders. Other Montagnard officers took refuge in the French Embassy, but the French gave them up and they were never seen again. Through the services of the evangelical Christian humanitarian group World Vision, Ksor’s family was extricated from Phnom Penh to Thailand before the evacuation of the city. The account is quite amazing as the passports and visas to embark on this last flight did not arrive before takeoff; however, when the plane had to circle back for a repair, the documents were delivered at the last minute and the Ksors made it on the flight.[[13]](#footnote-13)

 The family ultimately came to the U.S. under sponsorship by a family and a Baptist church in Charleston, South Carolina. United with Kok, the family lived in several places, including Charleston, Abilene, Kansas, and Newport News, Virginia before returning to Charleston for six years. Kok received a GED high school diploma and an associates’ degree in electrical engineering technology from Trident Technical College in Charleston. Through the offices of the daughter of the Ksor’s original sponsor in Charleston, who lived with her physician husband in Spartanburg, South Carolina, the family in Summer 1988 settled permanently in Spartanburg. The Ksors were members of the local Christian Missionary and Alliance church and Kok served as pastor to a Montagnard congregation in Greensboro, to which he commuted every other week. When the quite-elderly Spartanburg CMA congregation shuttered the church, the Ksor’s joined a local Baptist church. Kok worked in the technology field for the international textile giant Milliken & Company and later for another engineering company until his retirement in 1998.[[14]](#footnote-14)

 When the first Montagnard refugees arrived in North Carolina in 1986 and another group in 1993, Ksor had been in the U.S. for more than a decade and had gained citizenship. He was involved with the new refugee organizations but his priorities differed somewhat from their attention on resettlement and supporting Degar cultural identity in the United States. In 1990 Ksor founded the Degar Foundation, Inc. (Montagnard Foundation) to focus primarily on the persecution of Montagnard culture and religion in Vietnam and Cambodia. The organization gained U.S. IRS Section 501 (c) tax exempt status in August 1992. All the Montagnard groups were united in their identity and desire to maintain their culture, which was centered in their churches, but some division existed between the focus on communities in the U.S. vs. primarily emphasis on human rights violations and the persecution of Degar people in the Central Highlands.

 As in many such situations, political agendas, clashes between strong personalities, and church politics surfaced. As Thomas Pearson’s *Missions and Conversions: Creating the Montagnard-Dega Refugee Community* discusses the emergence of Dega identity, he views it as a conversion experience forged in the years of FULRO surviving in the jungle that developed a common ethnic religious unity. The Dega Protestant Churches were the products and center of this identity, although various pastors established different followings which caused new churches to split off from original ones. No real differences in theology existed as churches divided; the issue was personal followings and in some cases political ambitions. Pearson notes the conflict between Ksor and some other Montagnard pastors.[[15]](#footnote-15) Also adding to the divisions, Montagnards claim that communist agents were sent to the U.S. to sow dissension among the groups. Ksor was repeatedly targeted by the Vietnamese regime as a violent terrorist traitor trying to destroy the Vietnamese nation.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Religious Persecution

 Historically the Montagnards were animists. Catholic priests brought Catholicism into the highlands in the 1850s, and in the 1930s Protestant missionaries entered the area. Evangelical American Protestant missionaries, most prominently the Christian and Missionary Alliance focused on the highlands area, where they enjoyed great success in conversions. The Bible was translated into several Montagnard languages. Even after the communists took over, closed Christian churches and schools, and imprisoned ethnic minority pastors, converts continued aided by Christian radio programs broadcast from the Philippines. By the early 2000s, Protestants, primarily evangelicals, in Vietnam rose to a high estimate of 800,000 with the number in the Central Highlands as many as 400,000. Evangelical Christianity remains a central bond among the various ethnicities.[[17]](#footnote-17)

 In February 2001, in response to a Montagnard peaceful demonstration against confiscation of their land and infringements on religious freedom, the Vietnamese government reacted brutally, beating the participants and arresting hundreds. Over 1500 Montagnards fled to Cambodia during the next year. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) housed the refugees in two camps in Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri provinces. Throughout the year Montagnards continued to be persecuted in Vietnam, and hundreds more fled to Cambodia. The country did not want the refugee problem and under Vietnam’s relenting pressure for repatriation, Cambodia constantly returned desperate refugees to their fate in Vietnam. Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations documented the ongoing persecution of the Montagnards and the severe retaliations when they were forced back into Vietnam. In March 2002, Cambodia announced that it was closing down the camps and accepting no more refugees. UNHCR strived to gain refugee status for Montagnards in other countries.

 Throughout the next two decades, many incidents of persecution and exploitation of refugees by Vietnam and Cambodia continued unabated. Montagnard lands were given over to Vietnamese-run coffee plantations. Human Rights Watch extensively documented the incidents year by year. Montagnards periodically demonstrated to call attention to their plight, and Vietnam reacted brutally. Over 1000 individuals protested in Bon Me Thuot in April 2004, again meeting the same violent reaction from Vietnamese police. Vietnam cloaked their actions as a matter of national security against dangerous radicals attempting to undermine the state, including harming national solidarity and public order. Kok Ksor was cited as a foreign instigator. Vietnam also employed the red herring that insipient elements of FULRO were behind the actions, although FULRO was long dead. Even the last stragglers in the jungle had ceased to exist years before. As armed struggle was no longer possible, many Montagnards turned even more to religion. Pearson argues that what became known as Dega Protestantism was a direct outgrowth of FULRO and its demise in the jungle.

 Vietnam is signatory to United Nations and other international agreements on protecting religious liberty. The Vietnamese Constitution declares full religious freedom or freedom from religious belief, but Article 70 includes this conditional limitation: “No one can violate freedom of belief and of religion; nor can anyone misuse beliefs and religions to contravene the law and state policies.” This has provided justification for the nation’s violations as Vietnamese law decreed that “all religious groups register with the government and operate under government-approved religious organizations.” Unapproved religious groups or restricted independent congregations included Mennonites, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhists, Khmer Theravada Buddhists, and United Buddhists of Vietnam. But two new religious expressions that emerged in 2000 became prime targets. One was a Catholic sect, known as “Ha Mon” (named after the commune where the founder was born) Catholicism, founded in Kontum in 1999. Localized primarily to three provinces, it had an estimated 2500 followers by 2010. The government orchestrated ceremonies to force confessions of criminal intent and demanded signed pledges to abandon the “false religion.”

 But the government’s chief culprit was the new religious movement called “Dega Protestantism,” which had earlier origins but became prominent in 2000. Although evangelical Christianity was deeply established in the highlands for a half century, Vietnam lumped a large host of independent house churches of various kinds into one unity and decreed that so-called “Dega Protestantism” was “a false religion,” a guise for a political Montagnard independence movement against public order. Vietnam argued that national security demanded that it be crushed. The government pressured highland Christians to join the state-authorized Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV). However, Montagnards recognized that the SECV was a sham tool of the communists’ subversion. Vietnamese police and military units were dispatched at various times to break up house churches and to prevent Montagnards from seeking asylum in Cambodia. The government brought charges in provincial courts against individuals simply for being identified with Dega Protestantism. Forced confessions, public “constructive criticism,” and re-education followed. The clear message was not to have any involvement with Dega Protestantism.

 In the United States, the former FULRO soldier Kok Ksor, who had fought and nearly died many times for the Montagnard cause, was now a voice of non-violence and religious expression operating through several international venues. In 2000, while attending the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Peoples in New York City, he met Marco Perduca and Matteo Mecacci of the Global Committee for the Rule of Law, who were members of the Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational Transparty (NRPTT), but known less formally as the Transnational

Radical Party (TRP).[[18]](#footnote-18) The TRP added human rights in the Central Highlands to its agenda and Ksor became an active participant. As one of their spokesmen, he addressed several international conferences beginning with the TRP Congress in Tirana, Albania, in 2002.[[19]](#footnote-19)

 Ksor also met and began a long friendship with Sam Rainsy, exiled Cambodian human rights activist, with whom he shared similar views. Rainsy’s father had been deputy prime minister under Norodom Sihanouk and Rainsy himself had been a member of parliament and briefly Minister of Finance in the mid-1990s. A longtime enemy of Cambodian’s virtual dictator Hun Sen, Rainsy was banished from the country and convicted of purported crimes *in absentia.* Allowed to return in 2013, he won a seat in parliament and hoped to form an opposition government. At that time Rainsy and Ksor promulgated an agreement that in a future government headed by Rainsy’s Cambodian Nonviolent Radical Party, the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples would be central to protect Montagnard refugees fleeing to Cambodia. However, Rainsy was again stripped of his parliament seat and once more sent into exile. Among the fallacious charges, Rainsy was accused of planning to give away Cambodian territory to the Montagnards.[[20]](#footnote-20) In Fall 2018 Rainsy traveled to Charlotte to participate in a joint meeting between the Cambodian and Montagnard communities. Although suffering from cancer in the last months of his life, Ksor postponed his cancer treatments to participate in the meeting where the 2013 agreement was reaffirmed.[[21]](#footnote-21)

 By February 2014 when Ksor and Marco Pannella, longtime head of the TRP and member of the European Parliament for thirty years, met in Brussels, the TRP was collapsing. With the death of Pannella from cancer in 2016, the alliance further fragmented. Striving to keep whatever unity existed alive, Ksor welcomed Laura Harth, UN Representative of the Radical Party, to Spartanburg in December 2017 to visit the Degar community and present a project to re-launch the Radical Party.[[22]](#footnote-22) The effort was unsuccessful, but the Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational Transparty banner remains alive today as an international human rights NGO.

 Throughout his work, Vietnam propaganda attack Ksor as an insurrectionist and attempted to get Montagnards to repudiate him. They tortured his half-brother to gain a renunciation of him, forced five relatives to denounce him in self-criticism rallies, and for more than a decade, his mother, Ksor H’Ble, whom Kok last saw in the mid-1960s, was periodically harassed and physically assaulted to attempt to get her to condemn her son. In February 2001 she was forced to attend a staged television broadcast where Vietnamese security forces demanded that she denounced her son. When she refused and remained silent, she was beaten and three ribs broken. A committed Christian woman, H’Ble was again arrested at a prayer vigil, where she was shocked by an electrical stun gun and kicked repeatedly. She continued to suffer medical problems from this incident until she died. In October 2010 she was detained and ordered to repeat a written statement that called her son a traitor whom the Montagnards should not follow. Instead, she responded, “I don’t know what my son Kok Ksor is doing. How can I tell people not to follow him? If you know that he is doing, why can’t you tell the people yourself? Besides I am an old woman and who would listen to me?” Ms. Ksor H’Ble died, at age 80, on August 18, 2011. Between the day of her death and her funeral three days later, 16,000 Degar Christians from 37 nearby villages traveled to Bon Broai village to pay respects. The Vietnamese posted 2500 soldiers and security police to prevent people from other provinces from traveling to the village.[[23]](#footnote-23)

 Nothing could be farther from the truth than Vietnam’s charges against Ksor. Ksor readily admitted to his contacts in the country and encouraging protest and prayer vigils, but he was totally dedicated to non-violence which stemmed from his Christianity understanding. He expressed these views constantly in the local communities, nationally, and in international forums. On May 11, 2007, he spoke in Washington, DC, at the Commemoration of Vietnam Human Rights Day, sponsored by Vietnamese human rights activists. He emphasized that the Degar people did not hate the Vietnamese nor were they unwilling to live with them. The Degar people simply wanted human rights in their ancestral homelands. The Montagnard people and Degar churches did not wish to establish an independent state. “We reiterate that even if we so desired such, it is impossible for a population of less than a million and without armed forces to overthrow a government with a population of over 80 million who has also hundreds of thousands of fully armed soldiers at its command.” Ksor echoed his Christian message that “God created all human beings and if God loves us then God loves all humans that thus this planet is for all people to enjoy.”

 By invitation of TRP colleague Matteo Mecacci, a member of the Italian parliament, Ksor on November 19, 2009 spoke to the Human Rights Committee of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament in Rome, where he reiterated the same themes. He cited that groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, US International Commission for Religious Freedom, and others had acknowledged the violations against the Degar people. He noted how Vietnam destruction of their forests and replacement with state run coffee plantations destroyed a way of life. He accused the Vietnamese of “ethnic cleansing or a form of creeping genocide,” and prayed that “the Almighty God will create a compassionate heart in each and every one of the world leaders so that they will have compassion toward our people.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

 On February 20, 2012, Ksor made a statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights “Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,” citing continuing atrocities, including murders of Degar people, and confiscation of land transferred to ethnic Vietnamese. He reiterated a common theme that the Degar were not opposed to living among the Vietnamese people on Degar ancestral land, but that the violations of human rights of the Degar needed to cease.

 Ksor’s moderation was reflected in his deeply-held conviction that the soul of Vietnam itself was at stake: “The Vietnamese government and people need to change their attitude toward our people in order to live together in peace and prosper as one nation.” He reaffirmed that “We build our churches not to work against the government but to learn how we can transform ourselves to be a better human being according to the teaching of the Bible and to keep our mother tongue alive and most of all to have hope for future life.” He also linked Montagnard plight in the Central Highlands with other indigenous peoples such as Khmer Kampuchea-Krom people in the Mekong Delta and the Tai Dam people in Dien Bien.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Ksor’s Death

 Until his death, the quiet-spoken Ksor continued to reach out to political figures, the U.S. State Department, and the larger public with his message. He often asked the rhetorical question: why the U.S. ignored the treatment of the Montagnards, a people who had been their ally and who had fought and died with them. He pointed out the U.S. continued to ignore or discount that the extensive amount of Agent Orange used in the highlands still damaged his people.[[26]](#footnote-26) How could the U.S. scramble to engage in economic, business, social, cultural, and military agreements with Vietnam and totally ignore that nation’s violations of UN and other human rights agreements? The Montagnards were simply another case of collateral damage.[[27]](#footnote-27)

 But Ksor was not bitter; his primary focus was always on his faith. In his role as a pastor, he traveled constantly to Montagnard churches, and he continued to organize new churches in the area. He was an able fundraiser who headed the starting of at least thirteen churches in villages in Cambodia. The commitment and generosity of the Montagnard communities for this evangelism was extraordinary. Ksor never wavered from preaching that ultimately what was important was to love one’s fellow man and to seek God’s guidance. Hate was not of God and violence could never be the answer. He asked for his people to pray that God would change the hearts of the oppressors and open the minds and hearts of people around the globe to the plight of indigenous peoples. But always the core message was that focus could never be other than the ultimate freedom in God’s heavenly kingdom.[[28]](#footnote-28)

 In his private life, Kok was a devoted family man who loved his children and grandchildren. His website included many pictures of his family. It is an exceptionally accomplished family all with advanced education and significant career positions, primarily in medicine and technology. His wife H’li is described by those who know her as brilliant. His sons Daniel and Thomas are ITT specialists, the later with a hospital system; the two younger sons, physicians John and Jonathan, share a podiatrist medical practice. One daughter-in-law has a Ph.D. and is a counselor teacher in the public schools. The grandchildren follow in the same talented path.

 Although the family hoped to keep the Montagnard Foundation, Inc. (<http://www.Degarfoundation.org> or <http://www.Montagnarad-Foundation.org>) alive, it remains largely in name only today.[[29]](#footnote-29) Kok, a man of total dedication, was an inspirational, almost iconic, figure. It is difficult to sustain a mission built around a legend instrumental in virtually every activity of the movement from the beginning. The few remaining FULRO personalities today, who are involved with the other Degar organizations, are aged and dying off. Question exists how much of the fervor for the culture, people, and causes can be sustained by a second and third generation further removed from the realities on the ground in Vietnam and Cambodia and with an increasing assimilationist agenda.

 Although a man not desirous of profile or fame, and known only in a limited circles, Kok Ksor lived an extraordinary life of activity in war and peace. His accomplishments, although short of what he would have hoped to achieve for his people, cannot be discounted. The quest should continue for justice and basic human rights for peoples who cast their fate with the United States only to be abandoned and disregarded. Unfortunately, the political climate of the last years has not been one particularly supportive of immigrant peoples. But Kok Ksor’s work in behalf of his people cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

 To understand the Vietnam War in all its complexity, one cannot ignore the internal civil war between the South Vietnam government and the Central Highlands. That part of the American experience in the country is little understood by students and even scholars. Nor should one overlook the continuing plight of the Montagnards in Vietnam and Cambodia today. The American nation should not abandon its responsibilities to those who cast their fate with us. Obligations exist even when it is more convenient to put the past behind and pursue more lucrative political and economic agendas of the present. Against this proclivity, the life and message of Kok Ksor cries out.

1. Among other sources seeKou Yang*The Making of Hmong America: Forty Years after the Secret War*(NY: Lexington Books, 2017); Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); and Marjorie Lee,"Through Hmong America: A Bibliographic Journey,"*Amerasia Journal* 36.1 (2010): 105–114*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. On the Montagnards, see Oscar Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam's Central Highlanders: A Historical Contextualization, 1850-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013); four books by the eminent ethnographer of the region, Gerald C. Hickey: *Window on a War: An Anthropologist in the Vietnam Conflict* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2002); *Shattered World: Adaptation and Survival Among Vietnam Highland Peoples During the Vietnam War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); and *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands, 1954-1976* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954*. The original, and classic, study is Georges Condominas, *We Have Eaten the Forest: The Story of a Montagnard Village in the Central Highlands of Vietnam* (NY: Kodansha America, 1994). The book was researched at the end of the 1940s, published in French in 1957, and not available in English, except for an illegal pirated copy, until 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Montagnard organizations in North Carolina include Save the Montagnard People ([http://www.Montagnards.org](http://www.montagnards.org)), supported by American Vietnam War veterans; Montagnard Dega Association (<https://www.montagnardda.org/>; Montagnard Human Rights Organization (<http://www.mhro.org>). The websites of these organizations are dated which makes it difficult to determine how active they remain today. There are also several organizations that cross the lines with other indigenous peoples of Indochina. For instance, the Council of Indigenous Peoples in Today’s Vietnam (<http://ciptvn.org>), with headquarters in New York City and London, is the combined voice of the Cham, Khmer-Krom, and the Montagnards. See studies of the Montagnards: Thomas Pearson, *Missions and Conversions: Creating the Montagnard-Dega Refugee Community* (NY: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009); Cecily Cook, *Montagnard-Dega Community of North Carolina* (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1994; and Etsuko Kinefuchi, “Finding Home in Migration: Montagnard Refugees and Post-Migration Identity” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 3 #3 (2010): 228-248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2010.487220>. Also see *The Montagnards—Cultural Profile*, compiled by Raleigh Bailey, Center for New North Carolinians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, undated.

<http://www.culturalorientation.net › file › Montagnards+CP.>

 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On the role of the Trail, see John Prados, *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Tail and the Vietnam War* (NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), with particular attention to the early years, 1-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The many sources on the CIDG include the official government’s *U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam 1961-1971: Official US Army History of the CIDG Militia in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, out of print, republished by Red and Black Publishers, 2013); Shelby L Stanton, *Green Berets at War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956-1975* (Novato, CA: Presido, 1985); D.W. Carr, *The Civilian Irregular Defense Group in Vietnam: Civil Defense Forces in Counterinsurgency* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, privately published, 2019). More engaging sources are personal accounts of U.S. Special Forces who worked with the Montagnard. Examples include Roger Donlon, *Outpost of* Freedom (NY: McGraw Hill, 1965); Jim Morris, *War Story* (NY: Dell, 1979); and Daniel Ford, *Cowboy: The Interpreter Who Became a Soldier, a Warlord, and One More Casualty of Our War in Vietnam* (no address: Warbird Books, 2018). The latter book is the story of Y Kdruin Mlo, a Rhade tribesman, who in fighting with the French earlier took the name Phillippe Drouin; he became one of the most famous, and infamous Montagnards warriors with CIDG and FULRO. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The most complete story of FULRO is found in Hickey’s two books, *Free in the Forest* (1982) and *Window on a War* (2002). Also see Hickey, *Shattered World* (1993*)* and Sidney Jones, Malcolm Smart, Joe Saunders, *Repression of Montagnards: Conflicts Over Land and Religion in Vietnam’s Central Highlands.* Human Watch Report, April 23, 2002, 13-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hickey, *Shattered World*, 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Samantha Power, *Chasing the Flame: One Man’s Fight to Save the World* (NY: Penguin, 2008), 119-121. Vieira de Mello, who also negotiated with the Khmer Rouge and led Cambodian refugee returns from camps in Thailand, was most pleased for his role with gaining FULRO refugee asylum.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Nate Thayer and Leo Dobbs, “Tribal fighters head for refuge in U.S.A.,” *Phnom Penh Post,* October 23, 1992. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/tribal-fighters-head-refuge-usa>; and Thayer, “Vietnam era renegade army discovered: Lighting the darkness: FULRO's jungle Christians,” *Phnom Penh Post,* September 25, 1992. <http://www.nate-thayer.com/vietnam-era-renegade-army-discovered-lighting-the-darkness-fulros-jungle-christians/> . Both accessed July 22, 2020. Former FULRO leader, Pierre K’Briuh, an ethnic Sre Catholic, who escaped from Vietnam after spending nine years in communist prison camps, was an intermediary in making contact with the last FULRO fighters in 1992. K’Briuh is now a Catholic deacon in Greensboro, NC and former head of the Montagnard Human Rights Organization. Y’Hin Nie, a leader of the last group of FULRO to leave Cambodia in 1992, is also one of the most prominent Montagnard leaders in North Carolina. The pastor of the United Montagnard Christian Church in America in Greensboro, Nie was a former head of the Montagnard Dega Association. See lengthy article on Hie, “A Space for Montagnards: A Cultural Refuge in Greensboro,” no author cited, no date <http://www.ibiblio.org/redefininghome/montagnards>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In his study of the development of a cross-tribal elite through marriages and other associations, Hickey outlines the beginnings of what would later become the fuller Degar identity. In Hickey’s list of the 100 most important highlander leaders, 35 were Jarai and 34 were Rhade. The majority (55) of the one hundred leaders were listed as traditional followers of their ethnic group’s religion. Only one was a Buddhist, and 44 were Christians (30 Catholics and 14 Protestant). Kok and his uncle Ksor Dun were the only two Protestants of the Jarai. Eight of the Rhade were Protestant. Hickey came to know most of the leading highlander figures. When he spoke of Montagnard leaders, he often mentioned Kok, with whom he had various contacts, as the prominent younger leader along with the older peers. See Hickey, *Free in the Forest,* Appendix B, 304-307. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Don Bendell, *Snake-Eater* (Naples, FL: Speaking Volumes, 1994). Bendell, a prolific writer of nearly 30 Western adventure novels and Vietnam Special Forces accounts, draws on stories told by Ksor but wraps them in the exotic writer’s own dramatization. In the Epilogue, Bendell claims that he served as the original adviser to the Montagnard Foundation and as is considered a family member with the Ksor’s. The family did not confirm this claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Hear Ksor’s account of his family’s escape from Phnom Penh on a lengthy video of a presentation at his church, undated. Found on website of Covenant Baptist Church, Spartanburg, SC, <https://www.covenantbaptistonline.org/kok-ksor/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Brief Biography of Kok Ksor to 1993, Montagnard Foundation papers; and interviews with Ksor family, including Daniel, Jonathan, and H’Li Ksor, July 10, 2020. Daniel Ksor is the official head of the Montagnard Foundation, but it is a family enterprise. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Pearson, *Missions and Conversions*, particularly 85-91*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See [http://vietnamembassy-usa.org/activities/some-facts-about-montagnard-foundation-and-its-founder](%20http%3A/vietnamembassy-usa.org/activities/some-facts-about-montagnard-foundation-and-its-founder). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The primary information for religious and other persecution of the Montagnards in this and succeeding paragraphs is drawn from Human Rights Watch reports, particularly Sidney Jones, Malcolm Smart, Joe Saunders, *Repression of Montagnards: Conflicts Over Land and Religion in Vietnam’s Central Highlands.* Human Watch Report, April 23, 2002. ISBN 1-56432-272-6. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/vietnam>; and [*Montagnard Christians in Vietnam: A Case Study in Religious Repression*](http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d95751d2.pdf). Human Rights Watch Report, *March 2011.*[ISBN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISBN_%28identifier%29) [1-56432-755-8](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/1-56432-755-8). [https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/03/30/Montagnard-christians-vietnam/case-study-religious-repression.](https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/03/30/montagnard-christians-vietnam/case-study-religious-repression) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. An heir of the Italian center-right Liberal Party, a left splinter group break-off faction became the Radical Party in 1955. Transnational values and issues constituted the core policies. In 1989 the party transformed into the TRP which was more of a partnership across Europe than an actual party. Individuals who espoused the group’s values could stand for election under various party labels. Many disagreements and factions existed within what was always a very loose alliance. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See interview with Emma Bonino, head of the TRP, <http://www.emmabonino.it/press/about_emma_bonino/860>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. On Rainsy, see his copious website, <https://rainsysam.com>; Sam Rainsy, *We Didn't Start the Fire: My Struggle for Democracy in Cambodia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2013; and his most recent issue, “China Has Designs on Democracy in Southeast Asia: A Base in Cambodia Is Only the Beginning,” *Foreign Affairs* (June 10, 2020), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-06-10/china-has-designs-democracy-southeast-asia>. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Matteo Angioli, “In Memory of Kok Ksor,” http://globalcommitteefortheruleoflaw.org/in-memory-of-kok-ksor/. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Accounts cited on the independent human rights organization, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization website: “Montagnards: Relatives of Kok Ksor forced to confess 'wrongdoings' in Vietnam,” <http://www.unpo.org/article/733>, June 3, 2004; and “Degar-Montagnards: A Mother’s Silent Pain,” September 11, 2011,” <http://www.unpo.org/article/13190>. Also see, Nadia Hussein, <http://www.restlessbeings.org/human-rights/the-persecution-of-the-degar-people>. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “Degar Foundation Addresses the Italian Parliament,” http://www.degar.org.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. At the same time that Vietnam was displacing the Montagnards and attempting to crush their religious practice, the government was investing in the “selective” preservation of highland culture—artifacts, folklore, music, dances, handicrafts, etc. in museums and displays. The primacy of Vietnamese (*Kinh*) ethnicity is enshrined. As Oscar Salemink satirizes, in the socialist view not all elements of culture are worthy of retention in the process of developing society, and the party cadres know what is to be preserved as valuable and what to be abandoned in creating the more advanced society. “Outmoded habits” and “obsolete and backward practices” are to be eliminated. Bad habits include religious practices, unhygienic or wasteful rituals, non-scientific taboos, etc. Moreover, cultural practices need to be regulated by the state, including the quantity and quality of wedding gifts; and to ensure that folk practices conform to socialist ideals, professional and semi-professional dancers and singers are employed to perform for audiences, including tourists. *Kinh* peddlers sell tourist trinkets about Montagnard life produced by *Kinh* craftsmen. Inconvenient song lyrics are changed to conform to *Kinh* expectations, and vernacular languages are subordinated to Vietnamese—indeed only language communities over 500,000 were allowed to be taught at any level. A façade of a culture is retained as a sham while the essence of that culture is systematically eradicated. Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam's Central Highlanders,* 276-279. The policy of a national myth and economic development strategy was not new with the communists, as it had its origins in the 19th century. But it reached a new level with highlanders claims of restricting Montagnard births and in some cases the forced sterilization of Montagnard women. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Hickey’s report, “Perceived Effects of Herbicides Used in the Highlands,” Appendix C, *Free in the Forests*, 308-319, and fuller discussion, Hickey, *Window on a War,* 336-346, 355. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <https://www.covenantbaptistonline.org/kok-ksor/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. A Montagnard Foundation Facebook page is from a different source. On his posting, the originator of this site states that he began the Montagnard Foundation in 2018 to raise money for homeless children in Vietnam and the video posted seems to deal with Vietnamese children who live on boats in the Mekong Delta. This Facebook page was active through July 2019 with pictures from Montagnards in Vietnam and a post about a planned trip in 2021 to build a community center there. But only rare postings have occurred since then from external sources. The only one in 2020 was from a Vietnam tourist company. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)