DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AIRGRAM

TO:
Department of State WASHINGTON DC

FROM:
Ambassador BISH NOA, CAR TSO, DANAEG, USA IDNARC
CINCPAC, ISDEL JFC PACIS

DATE: March 21, 1974

SUBJECT: The Fifth Annual An Ong Congress and 1st Divisive Aftermath

REF:
(a) Saigon A-264, November 16, 1973; (b) Saigon 20864, December 12, 1973; (c) Saigon A-55, March 21, 1974;
(d) PVG 33,032, Dec 8, 1973; (e) Saigon 12409, July 10, 1974;
(f) PVG 33,114, Dec 27, 1973; (g) PVG 33,085, Dec 11, 1973;
(h) Saigon 21424, Dec 2, 1973; (i) PVG 33,115, Dec 27, 1973;
(j) PVG 33,164, January 30, 1974

CINCPAC FOR POLAD LIDDIS

Background and Summary Comment

1. Reference (a) discussed the acrimonious maneuvering which preoccupied leading An Ong Buddhist figures in mid-November as the Fifth Bi-Annual Congress of the An Ong Unified Buddhist Association (USA) drew near. The Fifth Congress, scheduled for December 10-12, was charged with two major tasks: accepting the USA Charter and selecting a new High Secular Council (HSC). In particular the position of Rector was at issue, having been vacated on January 23, 1973 by the death of the Venerable Thien Hoa, a pro-Spg high southerner. The controversial Venerable Thich Minh, a central Vietnamsite, an Acting Rector was drawing intense fire from southerners and from Venerable Tri Quang, who harbors

Enclosures:
1. Communiqué (unnamed) of December 11, 1973
2. Report No. 07 of December 12, 1973
3. Communiqué No. 0115-VHD/WP/DAC of December 14, 1973
4. Declaration of the Fifth Congress of December 12, 1973
5. Article by Venerable Thong Bao, undated
6. Listing of HSC Membership

Best Available Copy
a strong personal dislike for Thien Minh. Thien Minh's critics
variously charged him with being a lax monk, having misappropriated funds,
and with being "in the pay of the GVH". Some who feared an increase
in extremist opposition influence at An Quang hoped to retain Thien Minh
in some position of influence, but sought someone with a better personal
reputation as Rector.

2. In mid-November Thien Minh's determined campaign for the Rectorship
seemed in trouble. Tri Quang was tending to ally with the southerners
against him. However, ably assisted by Venerable Bayon Quang, ISC
Secretary General and a fellow "moderate", Thien Minh campaigned vigoro-
ously with provincial Buddhist figures. He succeeded in accumulating
forwardable support on the floor at the Congress, which eventually dead-
locked over the election (reference (b)).

3. This report will summarize the events which immediately preceded the
Fifth Bi-Annual Congress; proceedings at the Congress itself, and the en-
suing deadlock; and the efforts by Tri Quang and others which culminated
in the intervention of the Supreme Patriarch, who on January 11 named a
new High Secular Council. Information is incomplete on the sequence in
which certain events occurred, and on some details of the shifting per-
sonal allegiances. However in broad outline the picture provided below is
believed accurate.

4. The membership of the Council reflects a compromise between Thien Minh
and Tri Quang to the Virtual exclusion of southerners and has drawn harsh
criticisms from embittered southern extremists as a "frightened" group of
"GVH puppets". The new ISC is apparently functioning, although its charter
mandate -- "on a trial" -- and the continued animosity between Thien Minh and
Tri Quang, plus the hostility of southerners who feel cheated at the
outcome, will continue to make it difficult for the ISC to speak authori-
tatively for and to the faithful.

5. The prestige of the Buddhist leadership and of the Church itself
has suffered by the sometimes worldy squabbling of the past months. The
disarray in An Quang ranks in no doubt welcomed at Independence Palace
as reducing the capacity for coordinated action of a potentially sig-
ificant element in the opposition. However the squabbling at An Quang
also illustrates the continuing failure of one important element of
Vietnamese society to achieve political unity which, under the right
circumstances, could provide an asset to the anti-communist nationalist
cause.

6. This report will also briefly discuss the changes in the UDC Charter
which were approved at the Fifth Congress.
7. Transmitted separately as reference (c) is biographic data on the newly High Secular Council. In addition, this message forwards as enclosures 1, 2, 3 and 4 documents included following the Congress by the pro-Thien Hinh faction; as enclosure 5, a statement of the Church's anti-'third force' position; also published by a Thien Hinh supporter; and as enclosure 6, a listing of the newly High Secular Council appointed by the Supreme Patriarch by edict on January 11, 1974.

End Background and Summary Comment

8. A Fragile Compromise. As the December 10 opening date for the Fifth Bi-Annual Congress of the United Buddhist Association Congress (UBA) drew nearer, the campaign against Acting Rector Thien Hinh grew more intense. On November 29 a petition was circulated by the southern faction led by Ven. Ho Gia, Phap Tri and Bui Huu, aided by Senator Vu Van Hau and Deputies Kieu Hong Thu and Hoang Phuc. The petition urged southern Ven. Thien Boa to stand in opposition to Thien Hinh for the Rector's post. There was also circulating a letter accusing Thien Hinh and Hayon Quang of being "thoroughly corrupt." There was also press speculation about a possibly more prominent role for the Ven. Hayon Tri Quang.

9. According to PVS-33-082, December 8, 1973, Thien Hinh and Tri Quang and Thien Hinh in early December reached a tentative compromise "for the sake of the church unity": the post of Rector would go to Thien Hinh with Thien Hinh and Tri Quang being accorded equivalent newly-created positions as Advisors. Thien Hinh's condition for this was that his colleague Hayon Quang retain some influential post, either as Secretary General or perhaps as First Deputy Rector. The compromise proved fragile, however, for the following reasons: Thien Hinh was under continuing pressure from southerners and others to exclude Thien Hinh and Hayon Quang entirely; Ven. Dac Hoan, a northerner and an associate of Tri Quang, was also vehemently opposed to retaining Thien Hinh or Hayon Quang in any position of influence and was reportedly so angry at the compromise that he threatened to defy his mentor Tri Quang; and because Hayon Quang was gaining confidence that provincial support might just be sufficient to carry the day for Thien Hinh after all, hence making any concessions unnecessary. Although Thien Hinh attended a negotiating session with Tri Quang, Thien Hinh and Tri Thu on December 7, he was described as "angry" and "willing to go it alone" by one source.

10. The Supreme Patriarch's Directive. On December 9, as the eve of the Congress, another meeting of the senior bishops was convened at which a Directive from the Supreme Patriarch was read. It will be recalled that the Patriarch, 95-year-old Ven. Sac Thich Minh, had been elected in July 1973 (see reference (a)). Appointed then as his Chief Assistant was the Ven. Tri Thu, a respected central Vietnamese bishop whose assignment was reportedly to influence the Patriarch along lines acceptable to Tri Quang. The Patriarchal Directive read to the
assembled bonzos December 9 requested the Congress to do three things:

A. Elect Thien Hinh as Rector;
B. Retain all incumbent High Secular Council members on the Council;
C. However, to reassign responsibilities among them, in a fashion not specified in the directive.

II. Viewed by the Thien Hinh faction, the Patriarchal directive was less than satisfactory in that it denied the post of Rector to Thien Hinh; and could be used to further downgrade him from his incumbency as First Deputy Rector. Viewed by the southerners, the Patriarchal advice was also less than perfect, in that it from the composition of the HSC in its basically unsouthern and in their view unrepresentative, configuration (except of course for price of the post of Rector).

12. The Compromising Falls Apart. The Congress opened December 10 with Tri Quang in the chair. This gave rise to much press speculation that he might emerge from the Congress with more operative responsibilities, perhaps even with the Rectorship. However, Tri Quang soon relinquished the chair and resumed his more customary behind-the-scenes role.

13. Intense lobbying among Congress representatives ensued. Strong provincial delegation support for the Thien Hinh-Buien Quang faction became apparent. On that first day, December 10, Thien Hinh gave a fighting speech to the Congress. He targeted his lay opponents in the Buddhist Parliamentarians' Liaison Group (BPLG), attacking them for opportunism and insincerity in their claim to be the only true "strugglers." He charged his enemies with "sabotage" and "blasphemy," singling out Senator Ton That Hinh, publisher of Gesu Loan. Thien Hinh recalled his own leadership during the struggle, but asserted that now is not the time for the Church to play an overt political role. He called for the expulsion of the BPLG from their quarters in the An Quang Pagoda. At some point in the proceedings, it is not clear exactly when, a vote was taken and the BPLG censured. This was an impressive demonstration of Thien Hinh's floor strength. (See Enclosure 1 for a December 11 communiqué issued in the name of the Congress denouncing the BPLG.) Nevertheless, the BPLG still holds its meetings in An Quang which, it will be recalled, is still under the direct control of its Abbott, Thien Hinh, who is sympathetic to the BPLG. That the BPLG office is still at An Quang was confirmed by Vu Van Hau to an Embassy officer, March 2. (Moreover, on March 18 Senator Tran Quang Thuan told an Embassy officer the BPLG had moved out.)

14. In his capacity of Assistant to the Patriarch, Tri Quang read to the Congress the Patriarchal Directive referred to in paragraph 9 above. The next day, December 11, was taken up with further lobbying.
15. Thôn Hồ's Ultimatum and Walk-Out. Sometime on late December 11 or early December 12, Thôn Hồ and his southern supporters submitted a letter to the Congress in which they laid down a virtual ultimatum: Thôn Hồ said he would agree to accept the HSC Rectorship as the Supreme Patriarch had directed, but only if he could designate the top HSC leadership as follows: fellow southerner Trí Tinh as Deputy Rector in charge of internal affairs; Quang Bo, a northern opponent of Thôn Hồ and Trí Quang follower, as Deputy Rector in charge of external affairs; Tháp Trí, another southerner, as Deputy Rector for general affairs; and Huynh Vi, a south Central Vietnamese sympathetic to the southerners, as Secretary General. (An earlier list drafted by Thôn Hồ supporters had been purely northern.)

16. Counter-attacking, Thôn Hồ and Huynh Quang charged Thôn Hồ with seeking to dictate to the Congress and seeking to pack the HSC leadership with southerners. A vote was called for on the three recommendations in the Patriarchal Directive listed in paragraph 9 above: (a) Thôn Hồ was chosen Rector; (b) the Congress voted to retain all incumbents on the HSC; (c) but voted not to reassign responsibilities among them, as the Patriarch had directed. This last vote was a clear victory for Thôn Hồ and Huynh Quang, as it retained them in key positions of First Deputy Rector and Secretary General, respectively. Thôn Hồ then walked out of the Congress, according to some reports, thus highlighting the deadlock.

17. The Deadlock: More Walkouts. The final session of the Congress was convened at 2:30 p.m. December 12 with one of Thôn Hồ's principal opponents, Đúc Nhuan, in the chair. Đúc Nhuan first invited into the Congress hall several of the leading lay members of the Buddhist Parliamentarians' Liaison Group (BPLG). (See paragraph 13 above for previous Congress action concerning the BPLG.) Đúc Nhuan's invitation to the BPLG was viewed by Thôn Hồ's supporters as a challenge to the validity of all the Congress' previous proceedings, especially the key vote to retain all HSC incumbents in their previous positions. Thôn Hồ's supporters noisily challenged Đúc Nhuan on this point, charging that he as Chairman was deviating from the established agenda and pointing out that the Congress had already disassociated the Church from the BPLG.

18. This issue unresolved, the Congress prepared to turn to the next agenda item, a report by Secretary General Huynh Quang on projected Buddhist activities during the coming two-year term of the HSC. Again Đúc Nhuan intervened and urged to prevent Huynh Quang from speaking. Huynh Quang nevertheless delivered his address.
19. As this last day of the Congress wore on into the evening hours, debate became more and more acrimonious. Following a brief supper break, the bñosas gathered again at 10:15 p.m. Present was Tri Quang, whom many thought would propose some major compromise to break the deadlock, but he reportedly left the Congress after only twenty minutes. (Tri Quang was subsequently criticized for failing to speak out at this critical juncture by some bñosas.) Fighting to the end to prevent the Congress from confirming Thien Minh and Huyn Quang in their positions, Duc Khuan finally rose to address the shocked Congress with these words: "I have no evidence that the Venerable Thien Hôa has absent himself from these proceedings because he could not sit together with trespassers of Buddha's Law." This was an unmistakable public reference to the charges of concubinage and theft of Church funds which had been circulating against Thien Minh and Huyn Quang. Duc Khuan further asserted that he "had evidence" against the trespassers, which, however, he was not then authorized to reveal to the Congress, but which would be made available to appropriate Church disciplinary bodies. Reportedly speaking through tears, Duc Khuan then resigned his post as Secretary General of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council (in which capacity he had convened the Congress and chaired some of its sessions) and left the Congress.

20. At this point, Tu Khuan took the chair; a southerner, he was however supporting Thien Minh/Huyn Quang (see references (c) and (f)). Before the Congress could determine its next course of action, six members of the ESC rose, announced their resignations, and walked out. All anti-Thien Minh, those who walked out were either northerners allied with Tri Quang, or southerners: Quang Do, Gia Duc, and Quang Long, northerners; and Tri Minh, Tri Thanh, and Phan Thanh, southerners. Gia Duc later explained to an Embassy officer that this maneuver had been devised by Quang Do and himself and "cleared" with Tri Quang. It was also coordinated with Duc Khuan, whose own resignation and walkout immediately preceded theirs. Its intent, of course, was to disrupt the Congress before it could conclude its work, thus denuding Thien Minh and Huyn Quang of the support which at that point had in fact been reelected to their positions as First Deputy Rector and Secretary General. The six claimed that in their absence the Congress had dissolved and thus all its work to that point was null and void (except the previously adopted Charter amendments, which as will be seen below, Gia Duc was most anxious to see remain intact).

21. The Venerable Tu Khuan did not acknowledge that the Congress was no longer competent. He brought it to a formal close at midnight, declaring that if Thien Hôa refused to accept the Rectorship, the present ESC would remain in office (including of course Thien Minh as Acting Rector) until a new Congress could be convened. (Tu Khuan's final communiqué, in which he defends the competence of the Congress as described above, is appended as enclosure 2.)
22. The Charter Issue. Before dealing with the post-Congress confusion and acrimony, developments with regard to the internal Charter of the An Quang IRA should be described. Amending the Charter was one of the two principal tasks of the Fifth Congress, the other of course being the selection of a new High Secular Council. Well before the Congress opened, Venerable Duc Nhu wrote a letter to the Council, pointing out that proposals for amendments were coming in from various sources, and that the Congress would have to decide what to do with them. On December 2 and 3, a Committee chaired by Tri Quang met to discuss these. They included proposals:

A. To eliminate the term "Unified" from the title of the Association. Duc Nhu (a newbome) argued that the term perpetuated the concept of regionalism, and was therefore divisive;

B. To increase the power of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council (SEC), of which he was Secretary General, in secular affairs, at the expense of the High Secular Council;

C. To allow laymen to hold certain seats on the SEC, thus increasing the potential political role of that body.

23. While Tri Quang's role in the debate which followed was ambiguous, Duc Duc and his colleague and friend Quang Do opposed Duc Nhu strongly. (Tri Quang later reportedly said that while he opposed Thien Huy and lm yen Quang, Duc Nhu had "gone too far" in his vehement attacks on them, reference (1).) Duc Duc told an embassy officer that he was determined to prevent the SEC from usurping the secular affairs responsibilities of the SEC, as the former is composed of elderly monks who are "naive" politically and would be more subject to political manipulation than the more worldly younger monks on the SEC. He was also adamantly opposed to allowing laymen onto the SEC, a step he was sure would be backed by activists and in some cases extremist figures on the Buddhist Parliamentarians' Liaison Group (BPLG). Duc Duc feared a laymen's role on the SEC would open more radical influence in Church affairs.

24. On December 3 Duc Nhu's proposals were rejected. Amendments approved were:

A) To limit the public role of the Supreme Patriarch to one public statement annually;

B) To eliminate the post of Assistant to the Patriarch and to create a Deputy Patriarch who would succeed in the event of a vacancy;
C) To insert language in the Charter which would allow the Supreme Patriarch "to take appropriate action in extraordinary circumstances." This language was shortly to be invoked to justify the call for Patriarchal intervention following the deadlock at the Fifth Congress (reference K and paragraph 30 ff below).

25. Although Dac-Noan reportedly promised to continue to push for his amendments, on December 12 the Fifth Congress approved Gia Dac’s proposed amendments. When the six anti-Thien Minh boycotters walked out of the Congress late on last day of the Congress proceedings, they thought thereby to declare the Congress incompetent with regard to the election of a new Council, but did not seek to annul the amendments as voted December 12. Gia Dac has described this outcome as highly satisfactory to him and other anti-communists on the HSC.

Tu Hoon’s Declaration and Communiqué

26. On December 14, Venerable Tu Hoon, in his capacity as Chairman of the Congress at its close, issued a Communiqué No. 0115 to the faithful which asserted that the Fifth Congress had come to a successful conclusion, having "voted the amendments to the Buddhist Charter" and having "unanimously" voted to retain the HSC in office until the convening of another Congress (see enclosure 3).

27. On the same date Tu Hoon also circulated a more lengthy Declaration, dated December 12, which summarized in more detail the work of the Congress from the Thien Minh/Huyen Quang point of view (see enclosure 4). The Declaration asserts that the Congress had escaped its last hours the "danger that could have wrecked it and disrupted the Church." The Declaration asserts the validity of the Congress vote retaining the Council membership intact “until another Congress can be held to elect the High Secular Council for a new term.” Furthermore the Declaration maintained that the Fifth Congress "opposed any attempt to ... restore the powers of the organisations which have discriminated against and sought to destroy Buddhism" (here read the BFD).

28. On the Issue of Peace. Regarding the issue of peace, the Declaration issued by Tu Hoon restated the conventional formulation which, under the leadership of Thien Minh, has been the hallmark of similar Church statements this past year: the Paris Agreement is to be fully implemented, those who violate it are to be condemned, and the RVN is responsible for solving the pressing problems of the people "otherwise, disturbances will become inevitable." Finally the Declaration also warned all clergy and believers "both in and outside the country, to guard against any attempt to subvert the Church, regardless of origin, and to continue implementing the resolution of the Church's Fourth Congress.” This is the exhortation to hold to the low-profile, discouraged political posture which the HSC has advocated since the signature of the Paris Agreement.
29. And Especially No Third Force Role for the Church. Elaborating
on this important point, Venerable Thong Buu wrote an article which
was enclosed in the publication issued by the UDA following the Fifth
Congress. Thong Buu strongly attacks the idea that the Church should
take a position with regard to the "Third Force" because "the latter
has not made itself known yet." Thong Buu argues, "The UDA has put
forth its own doctrine of reconciliation. But some still ask, why
does it not want to set itself up as a third force? ... The reason
is that the UDA has no desire to rank itself with or against the two
antagonists, and thus become a third antagonist. Two political colors
are obstacles enough to any real solution for our country." Thong
Buu concludes that the Church will play "no go-between role ..." (See
enclosure 5 for the text of Thong Buu's article.)

30. Despite the hold-fast stance of the Thien Minh group in asserting
that the Fifth Congress had legitimized the present HSC until another
Congress could be held, strongly conflicting views eventually prevailed.
Not however without an extended period of more acrimonious and public
disagreement which left the reputation of the Church and its leadership
badly bruised.

31. The Thien Minh/Buyen Quang group continued to promote its position
through issuing documents and declarations such as those above. Buyen
Quang retained his office at An Quang and function of HSC Secretary.
General despite cries against him. (Bui Quang was reportedly very
critical of Buyen Quang for continuing to act as HSC Secretary General.)
On December 15 BPLG leader Vu Van Hau convened a meeting decrying the
BPLG "expulsion" and calling on Thien Boa, the presiding Abbess at
An Quang, to move the HSC offices out of the building so as to escape
the hands of the " usurper." Falling in this, lay leaders of the BPLG
asserted their right to continue to meet at An Quang, while launching
in alliance with Duc Huynh a personal counterattack on Thien Minh. The
latter claimed he would publish the charges of concubinage, theft, and
perversion against Thien Minh and Buyen Quang. Some Thien shortly began
to attack the " sabotaging of decreed bonzes". Duc Huynh also declared
on December 13 that henceforth all Church business would be conducted
by the Supreme Patriarch.

32. December 16 and 17 saw fruitless meetings convened by Tri Thu at
which various combinations of senior bonzes sought but failed to reach
agreement (references (e) and (i)). On December 17, Venerable Thien Minh
submitted a letter of resignation as Acting Rector (this was Thien Minh's
second "resignation" in four weeks). He posed however as a condition
that Buyen Quang be retained in a position of influence. The southerners
demurred, saying they would have nothing to do with Buyen Quang. On
December 26 Thien Minh reportedly softened this condition somewhat
(reference (i))). Rumors began to circulate that yet another schism was
facing the Church, either by disgruntled southerners or by the Thien Minh
faction.
33. **Tri Quang Intervenes.** However, the contending factions recoiled from the prospect of another election. On December 22 about 25 senior bishops met with Tri Quang and agreed to invoke the new language in the Charter to call for the intervention of the Supreme Patriarch. Various combinations were noted: that Tri Quang, Quang Do, Tri Thu, and Thien Hoa act in place of the HSC for three months pending a new Congress; that a new Congress be convened (Tri Quang strongly objected to this, on grounds that Thien Minh and Hayen Quang would again influence the provincial delegates, reference (j)); that a "Buddhist Affairs Committee" be selected from a wider group of bishops to run the USA until a new Congress in 1974 (Thien Hoa's idea); and that the Patriarch be requested to co-opt a new HSC. The latter was decided upon, and Tri Thu was despatched to Ha Noi to summon the elderly Patriarch.

34. On December 31 the Supreme Patriarch arrived in Saigon and launched a series of consultations with the various factions. These took place against a continuing backdrop of sordid acrimony. For example, a charge of 14 separate instances of incitement against Thien Minh were aired in Song Than. (Thien Minh has lodged a libel action against the paper which has not yet been resolved in the courts.) There were accusations that access to the Supreme Patriarch was being manipulated by one or the other faction. A letter "signed in blood" protesting Thien Minh was delivered to the Patriarch. On January 1 Thien Minh and Hayen Quang presented their case to the Patriarch, stressing the fact that the Congress had lawfully voted to retain the former HSC intact. The next day southerners Ho Cien and Thien Hoa met with the Patriarch, who sought to convince Thien Hoa that he should accept the post of Rector. The latter reportedly agreed but only on condition that HSC seats be denied Thien Minh and Hayen Quang. The bargaining and jostling continued for several days (see reference (j)).

35. **A New High Secular Council Named.** The Patriarch finally agreed to Tri Quang's suggestion that he decern the membership of a new HSC. The Patriarchal edict dated January 6 was circulated within Church circles January 11, and it is from this date that the appointees are deemed effective. The term of office is one year, i.e., until January 11, 1975 when a Sixth Congress is to be convened.

36. The Venerable Tri Thu was named Rector while both Tri Quang and Thien Minh were designated to new positions as Council Advisors. Hayen Quang was named to the post of Deputy Rector. The new Council represents a compromise between the Thien Minh and Tri Quang central Vietnamese factions at the expense of the southerners who lost their main positions. (See enclosure 6 for a list of the new HSC and reference (c) for an analysis and biographical detail.)
37. The new HSC was denounced immediately by southerners and extremists as "rightist", a "tool of the GVN", and "corrupted". An attempt to announce and invest the new HSC on January 10 failed because many southerners refused to participate. On January 12 the new HSC was announced to the general public without any ceremony, and on January 14 the Patriarch returned to his Huu Pagoda.

38. Other Assignments. With the designation of Tri Thu as HSC Rector, his position as Assistant (now termed Deputy) to the Patriarch became vacant. Another important position on the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council, that of Secretary General, had also been vacated when Dac Nhan resigned on December 12. The Venerable Thien Nho has been appointed by the Patriarch to the Deputy position; so far no name to replace Dac Nhan has yet been announced. Thien Nho's assignment thus places a southerner as next in line to succeed. Another Venerable, Huy Liong, was appointed Aide to the Patriarch.

39. The Swedish Gift Affair. Sometime during the early summer of 1973, a Swedish benevolent organization presented as a gift to the An Quang Unified Buddhist Association a sum amounting to 101,650,450 $VN. (Dollar equivalent at current exchange rate of $1.00 = 590$VN is about $175,000, a substantial sum.) Huyen Quang as HSC Secretary General received the money. The enormity of Thien Minh and Huyen Quang immediately charged that the fund was being improperly used. Added to other allegations of personal misconduct against Thien Minh, the "Swedish gift" charges further poisoned the atmosphere at An Quang.

40. During the floor fight at the Fifth Congress, two southern bishops, who had previously been harshly critical of Thien Minh, abruptly shifted to his support: Venerables Phap Lan and Thong Bon. Their shift has never been fully explained. However according to Vu Van Nau, Phap Lan shifted sides because of a promise from Huyen Quang of substantial funding from the Swedish gift for Phap Lan's Committee to Free Buddhist Political Prisoners (see reference (f)). Nau further alleged that support for Thien Minh and Huyen Quang had similarly been bought from Venerable Tu Khoi, the HSC Treasurer who chaired the Congress in its tumultuous closing moments (see paragraphs 20 ff above). According to Nau, Tu Khoi was given a substantial amount to build a pagoda in his home province of Sadech, in the Delta. Whatever the truth of such allegations, they illustrate the unhealthy atmosphere of manipulation pervading debate on important matters at An Quang.

41. Counterattacking on the Swedish gift issue, Huyen Quang on January 1 issued a public statement denying the charges, listing the amount as somewhat in excess of 103 million $VN (it had been rumored as much larger). On January 5 the HSC announced that anyone with a legitimate need for the information could audit the Swedish fund account. While the issue probably still festers, it has not again been raised publicly since.
42. **Angry Reaction But Investiture Finally on February 10.**

The initial angry southern reaction to the new USC was as noted above. Southern bonzes walked out of a January 8 meeting at which the Patriarch announced his edict. They refused to participate in any investiture ceremony for the new Council, first scheduled for January 10, then January 12, then again January 30. Clandestine "Radio Liberation" termed the new Council a group of "traitors" in a broadcast monitored January 10. On January 15 a meeting was held at the house of General Duong Van "Big" Minh at which many of his southern political associates condemned the appointments as "rightist" and "designated by the OVN". The meeting reportedly concluded that the new Council would only function "temporarily", although speculation that a southern schism might occur soon died away. A ceremony of investiture was finally held at An Quang February 10, presided over by Tri Thu.

43. **The new Council is now operative.** However, harassed by the remaining personal and regional animosities, it cannot speak for the faithful with its former authority.

HARMIN

Classification Approved by
Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs
J. H. Bennett
Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Association
High Secular Council

Communique

Following submission of reports from various (provincial) Associations, the Congress, in its session on the afternoon of December 11, 1973, discussed various problems relating to the various Associations this past term. Particularly, the Congress dealt with the scheme of exploiting factional and regional divisions which has led to a disruption of Church unity and to a lowering of dignitaries' prestige, with a view to paralyzing the leadership machinery of the central Church organization. Various communications media, such as the press and leaflets, have been employed in this effort. Typical is daily Core Jang which, during the past eight months, has unleashed slanders and distortions aimed at wrecking the prestige of the Church's leading dignitaries.

Various organizations attempting to exploit Buddhism, such as the "Buddhist Parliamentarians' Liaison Group" and the "Ho Phap Layson's Group" played a role in this scheme. The Congress denounced these tactics by forces hostile to Buddhism of "breaking the bundle of chopsticks one by one".

Because of the present very serious and complicated situation of the Church and of the country, the Church must be directed by a clear-sighted, courageous, unified leadership in these days ahead. This is why the Congress has uncovered and criticized these schemes for the faithful to see and understand. At the same time, the Congress has adopted the following Resolutions:

1. The Congress rejects all slanders and distortions against leading dignitaries on the High Secular Council;

2. The Congress fully rejects the "Buddhist Parliamentarians' Liaison Group" and the "Ho Phap Layson's Group";

3. The Congress appeals to all levels of the Church to heighten vigilance with regard to those organizations which seek to exploit Buddhism and which do not fall within the purview of the General Association of Laymen or other organizations recognized by the Unified Buddhist Church.

Saigon, December 11, 1973
Fifth Congress of the Church
(Disseminated by the Office of the High Secular Council of the Unified Buddhist Association)
Enclosure 2 to
Saigon A-56

UNCLASSIFIED

Viet Nam Unified Buddhist Church
High Secular Council

Office:
243 Su Van Nhan
Saigon 10

Report No: 07
(December 13, 1973)

Chairman: Venerable Duc Huynh (at the beginning)
Venerable Tu Hien (at the end)

Secretary: Venerable Thich Quang Thanh (who had resigned from
the function of Secretary together with Venerable
Tu Hien and Venerable Hai Xuan, at the end of the
Fifth Congress on December 12, 1973, but was later
invited again by the Congress).

Present: Venerables Phap Lam, Ho Giac, Quang Do, Tu Hien,
Man Giac, Giac Duc, Tri Quang, Phap Tri, Tri Thinh
and all delegations of representatives of provinces,
cities and districts of the Capital.

Opening: At 22:15 on return from the School of Youth for
Social Welfare, after having supper there.

Discussion: Continued to discuss the election of the new Steering
Committee of the High Secular Council for its
5th term of office.

Opinions: To invite Venerable Thien Hoo to assume the post of
Rector, and to approve that the remaining members will
be invited by Venerable Thien Hoo, and to consider
that as a condition for obtaining the approval of
the Venerable.

According to the petition of the absolute majority of the
deleagations of representatives attending the Congress, correctly to
carry out the instructions of the Patriarch, the Congress decided
to invite Venerable Thien Hoo to assume the function of Rector; and
to maintain all the remaining members in office, as formerly.

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According to the instructions of the Venerable Assistant to the Patriarch (Tri Thu), if a deadlock arises, the High Secular Council for the 4th term of office should be maintained in office until another Congress is held.

The Congress came to a deadlock, the Venerable who presided over the Congress (Duc Huan) resigned, and charged the Congress to elect another Chairman.

Venerable Tu Nhao was invited by the Congress to preside with the consent of Venerable Duc Huan, who had resigned.

Venerable Tu Nhao, as Chairman, broke through the deadlock of the Congress, and the Congress unanimously agreed with the following decisions:

1. Seriously to execute the instructions of the Patriarch, inviting Venerable Thien Hoa to assume the post of Rector and maintaining in office all the remaining members as formerly;

2. In case Venerable Thien Hoa refuses, the Congress should invite the whole High Secular Council for the 4th term of office to remain in office until another Congress is held by the Church to elect a new High Secular Council, as instructed by the Venerable Assistant to the Patriarch (Tri Thu).

Closing: The Congress closed at 24:00

Signed and Sealed
Chairman
Venerable Tu Nhao

Secretary
Venerable Thich Quang Thanh
The 5th Buddhist Congress ended at midnight on December 12, 1973, after voting the amendments to the Buddhist Charter, and the Buddhist Program of Action for the new term. Noteworthy is the fact that it unanimously voted the keeping in function of the 4th term High Secular Council until the convening by the Church of a Congress to designate a new High Secular Council.

Signed: Venerable Tu Nhuan
Chairman of the Convention
DECLARATION

of the Fifth Congress of the
Viet Nam Unified Buddhist Church

Considering:

Ten years since its foundation, the Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Church has met with repeated and ever-worsening difficulties and subversion from within and from without, especially since the late Patriarch died;

The Church has tried to overcome the obstacles, and has contributed greatly to the major historic deeds with regard to the people and Buddhism;

The Fifth Buddhist Congress has been held while the war is still going on in this country, with its exhausted economy, depressed society, and most critical divisions between the people;

The Fifth Buddhist Congress, in order to continue the mission and preserve the tradition of the Church, unanimously

Proclaims:

A. As our internal policy:

1) Respectfully to express gratitude to all those monks and Buddhists, for their noble sacrifices during the past ten years, that have helped the Church exist and develop;

2) With absolute unanimity and unprecedented clear-sightedness and persistence of its members in the voting for the leadership of the Church, during its last hours the Congress has escaped the danger that could have wrecked it and disrupted the Church;

3) The Congress fully voted to retain the High Secular Council of the Fourth term until another Congress can be held to elect the High Secular Council for a new term;

4) The Congress calls upon the clergy and believers both in and outside the country to guard against any attempt to subvert the Church, regardless of origin, and to continue implementing the resolutions of the Church's Fourth Congress;

5) The Congress is opposed to any attempt to retaliate on the Buddhist by restoring the powers and organizations which have discriminated against and tried to annihilate Buddhists (Comment: Here read SUDIC).
8. As an external policy:

6) The Church appeals to the parties of the Vietnam war to fully comply with the Paris truce agreement of January 27, 1973;

7) The Church firmly opposes the deliberate violations of the Agreement, on the part of any party that tries to extend the war, which tends to break out again;

8) The Church demands that the RVN Government urgently solve the crises which are seriously affecting the people's life; otherwise, disturbances will be inevitable;

9) The Church appeals to all peace-loving people in the world and to the nations connected with the Paris Agreement to seek means to have the concerned parties respect and comply with the Agreement so as to bring about an early peace in Viet Nam.

Made in Saigon, on December 12, 1973.

The Chairman
of the Convention's Last Meeting.

Signed:

Venerable Thich Tu Nhon

Venerable Thich Tu Nhon
The Vietnamese Buddhist Unified Church and the Third Force
(Van Thong Bao)

A recent rumor said that the Fifth Buddhist Congress and a number of Buddhist leaders had declared that they would not recognize the Third Force.

What I write below is designed to dispel a misunderstanding among members of the Buddhist congregation, a misunderstanding caused by misinformed and ambitious personas of influence, and not to dissim or confirm that rumor.

First of all, the Fifth Buddhist Congress was publicly held with the attendance of nearly one thousand delegates and Buddhist leaders, but not one ever heard the Congress make any affirmation or denial with regard to the Third Force.

More: Buddhism is a peace-advocating religion. The Buddhist laity as well as the leaders of the Vietnamese Unified Buddhist Church have made bloody sacrifices with the sole purpose to secure peace for VN. Now that peace has just taken shape, their purpose is to safeguard it at any cost (which is one of the four points advocated by the Buddhist Church).

Does it make sense to say that they are safeguarding peace while denying the Third Force? But the controversial point arise in the fact that the understanding from one person to another about that force differ, because the Force has not made itself known yet.

Under the Paris Accord, the Third Force shall consist of two halves, each being designated by one South Vietnamese party. As a consequence of this, it cannot be an independent force, and how can it be called a Force while it is denied independence? And composed as it is, how can it reconcile the two antagonist parties?

According to the concept and the stand of the Unified Buddhist Church, the Third Force should consist of those persons who do not espouse the doctrine of this or that side. With that composition, can it be strong enough to carry out the important mission entrusted to it by the nation?

"The UBA has put forth its own doctrine of reconciliation. But some still ask, why does it not want to set itself up as a Third Force? Especially as the Church is uniquely qualified for this? UBA has no desire to rank itself with or against the two antagonists, and thus become a third antagonist. The political colors are obstacles enough to any real solution for our country. The establishment of a Third Force, or third..."
Encl 5 of
Saigon 4-56

UNCLASSIFIED

political faction by the Unified Buddhist Church, could lead straight to new strife with the other two parties before it could accomplish anything good. This is the reason why the Unified Buddhist Church wishes to stay outside the dispute, and outside their orbits of both factions. This means that the Unified Buddhist Church will not oppose any side. The Unified Buddhist Church makes reconciliation its duty, but it will play no go-between role, because an intermediary must rank with or below the contending parties, and this would in fact become another obstacle to reconciliation.

/s/ Venerable Thong Bui
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Enclosure 6 to Saigon A-56
According to Venerable Gia Dac, the titles of First, Second, and Third Deputy Rectors have been abolished and all three Deputies have equal standing. They would have to choose from among themselves a successor to the Rector, should that post fall vacant. However, press accounts of the new Council invariably list: Gia Dac as First Deputy Rector, Quang Do as Second, and Phap Tri as Third. It seems likely that in fact they will exert authority in roughly that order.

The legislative history behind the peculiar title of Acting Youths Commissioner General dates back to the 1971 Fourth Congress, when Thien Ninh and Tri Quang clashed over the election of Gia Dac to replace the former as Commissioner General. The title is a holdover from a compromise reached then. Gia Dac is a voting member of the Council, however, and for all purposes exercises full authority over youth affairs.