

EMERGENCY DOSSIER

SPIRITUAL LIFE CRISIS IN GIA BINH

A dossier on the impact of freedom of religion or belief on people and communities displaced by the government's implementation of the Gia Binh Airport Project, Bac Ninh Province, Viet Nam



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Vietnam Human Rights Documentation Initiative (VHRDI)

Democracy Times (DCT)

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THE SPIRITUAL LIFE CRISIS IN GIA BINH

A Dossier on the Impacts on Freedom of Religion or Belief Affecting People and Communities Displaced by Land Loss under the State-Implemented Gia Binh International Airport Project, Bac Ninh Province, Viet Nam

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This dossier documents the ongoing spiritual life crisis affecting people and communities displaced by land loss under the State-implemented Gia Binh International Airport Project.

The findings show that the loss of land has not only altered religious, belief and spiritual institutions, but has also dismantled the ecosystem that has sustained spiritual life, disrupted long-established practices, and created an uncertain future for affected communities.

The dossier identifies the responsibilities of the State, records the aspirations of affected people and communities, and proposes solutions and recommendations aimed at preventing the further spread of this crisis while helping to ensure human rights in development projects involving land acquisition and community displacement.

Gia Binh is not merely an isolated case. This dossier demonstrates that freedom of religion or belief can be affected through a spiritual life crisis, when the conditions that enable people and communities to sustain their spiritual life are diminished or taken away.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Dossier

The Gia Binh International Airport Project is driving one of the largest land acquisition and community displacement processes in Viet Nam in recent years. This process has not only transformed where people live and how they sustain their livelihoods, but has also affected the institutions, community relationships, and historically rooted spaces that have sustained spiritual life for generations. Gia Binh is documented as a comprehensive picture of the ongoing human rights and life crisis affecting people and communities displaced by land loss. Within that broader picture, freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is identified as one of the rights being affected through an ongoing spiritual life crisis.

This dossier documents and assesses the impacts on FoRB arising from the displacement of people and communities through land acquisition under the State-implemented Gia Binh International Airport Project. On that basis, it identifies the responsibilities of the State, records the aspirations of affected people and communities, and proposes rights-based solutions and recommendations to help respond to the crisis. The dossier focuses on the impacts on FoRB in the context of land acquisition and community displacement within the Gia Binh International Airport Project area. It is a thematic human rights dossier that examines FoRB as one dimension of the broader spiritual life crisis while situating its impacts within the wider human rights crisis unfolding in Gia Binh.

1.2. Legal and Analytical Framework

This dossier is grounded in international human rights standards, with particular emphasis on FoRB. Its legal framework draws upon Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and General Comment No. 22 of the United Nations Human Rights Committee concerning freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Where relevant, the dossier also refers to international standards relating to participation in cultural life, the rights of the child, and the general principles governing the protection of human rights in the context of development.

Rather than focusing solely on individual religious institutions or religious activities, this dossier assesses FoRB through the practical conditions that enable the right to be exercised. FoRB is protected not only through legal recognition or the existence of religious institutions, but also through the ability of people and communities to sustain the conditions necessary to exercise that right in everyday life.

From this perspective, religious, belief and spiritual institutions, cultural spaces, cemeteries, ancestral halls, community relationships, and spiritual practices maintained across generations are all understood as essential conditions for the exercise of FoRB. The dossier therefore examines whether land acquisition and community displacement have diminished or removed the conditions that have enabled people and communities to exercise this right in practice.

1.3. Documentation Methodology

This dossier follows a human rights documentation methodology, drawing upon the collection, cross-checking, and analysis of multiple sources of information to assess the impacts of the Gia Binh International Airport Project on FoRB. The information used includes official State documents, materials from religious organizations and local communities, field documentation, testimonies and accounts from affected residents, as well as relevant media reports and reference materials. Key findings have been cross-checked across multiple sources to strengthen the reliability of the documentation.

The dossier focuses on assessing the impacts on the exercise of FoRB by affected people and communities in accordance with international human rights standards. It does

not seek to determine the legal liability of any individual, nor does it evaluate the economic efficiency or technical feasibility of the project.

2. CONTEXT OF THE CRISIS

2.1. The Gia Binh International Airport Project and Land-Displaced Communities

The Gia Binh International Airport Project is a major national infrastructure project currently under implementation in Bac Ninh Province. Its development has involved large-scale land acquisition, site clearance, and the displacement of thousands of households across communities that have evolved over many generations. According to official documents, the project covers approximately 1,884.88 hectares and affects around 7,100 households, individuals, and 118 organizations, of which approximately 5,800 households are subject to relocation and resettlement.

The loss of land has not only transformed where people live but has also altered the institutions, community relationships, and environments that have sustained religious practice, belief, and spiritual life. The documentation further shows that the project affects a dense and interconnected network of religious, belief and spiritual institutions.

Table 1. Religious, Belief and Spiritual Institutions within the Gia Binh International Airport Project Area

Type of Institution	Recorded Scale
Catholic churches	5
Catholic charitable institution	1
Buddhist temples	At least 9
Village communal houses	At least 8
Shrines	1
Folk worship temples	Approximately 28
Village worship markers and roadside altars	Dozens
Ancestral halls (lineage temples)	Dozens
Public cemeteries and graves	Approximately 18,800 graves
Catholic cemeteries	3
Historical, cultural and spiritual heritage sites	25 sites (1 National Heritage Site, 12 Provincial Heritage Sites, and 12 listed heritage sites)

Source: Compiled from official government documents, publicly available materials, and documentation conducted by the dossier team.

The scale of the affected institutions demonstrates that the project impacts not only people's homes and livelihoods but also the broader environment that sustains the spiritual life of entire communities. Against this background, examining the project through its chronological development is essential for understanding how the impacts on FoRB have emerged and evolved.

2.2. Project Timeline and the Emerging Impacts on FoRB

To illustrate the relationship between the implementation of the Gia Binh International Airport Project and its impacts on FoRB, this dossier summarizes the project's principal milestones together with the significant consequences for the spiritual life and religious or belief practices of affected communities.

Table 2. Key Timeline

Period	Major Development	Significance for FoRB
Sep 2024	Announcement of the investment policy for the Gia Binh International Airport Project.	Concerns emerged regarding land acquisition and its potential impacts on community religious, belief and spiritual spaces.
Nov 2024	Publication of the project master plan and land acquisition boundaries in Gia Binh and Luong Tai districts.	Residential areas, cemeteries, ancestral halls, communal houses, temples, and other religious and belief institutions were identified as affected or at risk of relocation.
Dec 2024 – Feb 2025	Surveys and inventories of land, property, structures, and graves for compensation and site clearance.	Many families began preparing rituals associated with relocating graves, ancestral altars, and other practices linked to land, lineage, and community life.
Mar – Dec 2025	Large-scale compensation, land acquisition, and relocation.	Community religious, belief and spiritual life experienced significant disruption as traditional spiritual spaces were altered, interrupted, or relocated together with the communities themselves.
Jan – June 2026	Land acquisition and relocation continued while many resettlement sites remained unfinished.	Many households lived in temporary accommodation or had not yet established permanent homes, affecting ancestral worship, lineage activities, spiritual spaces, and community religious or belief practices.
July 2026	Continued land acquisition and site clearance for project expansion and infrastructure associated with the APEC 2027 Summit.	The scope of impacts expanded further, prolonging disruptions to the religious or belief practices of displaced communities.
July 2026	Completion of this impact assessment by VHRDI.	The dossier documents the impacts on FoRB while the project remains ongoing and presents analysis and recommendations aimed at ensuring that the right is protected in accordance with international human rights standards.

This timeline is not intended to catalogue every administrative decision or every stage of the project. Rather, it highlights those developments that are most relevant to assessing the project's human rights impacts. From the announcement of the master plan through land acquisition, relocation, temporary housing, and resettlement, each stage has altered the conditions that enable people and communities to sustain their spiritual life.

2.3. Land, Community, and the Conditions for the Exercise of FoRB

In Viet Nam, spiritual life has traditionally developed through the close relationship between land, community, and local history. It is not expressed solely through organized religions. It also encompasses folk beliefs, ancestor veneration, village guardian deity worship, Mother Goddess worship, the care of ancestral graves, activities at communal houses, temples, churches, shrines, ancestral halls, traditional festivals, and many other spiritual practices that have been maintained across generations.

Religious, belief and spiritual institutions are more than physical structures. They preserve collective memory, cultural traditions, family lineage, and religious and belief practices that have evolved over time and been transmitted throughout the history of village life. Together with the communities that sustain them, these institutions create the environment in which people exercise their spiritual life in everyday living.

Within this context, land is more than a place to live or earn a livelihood. It provides the material foundation for both community life and spiritual life. When people and communities lose their land, the consequences extend far beyond changes in residence or land-use rights. They also affect the institutions, social relationships, and environments that have sustained their spiritual life.

Accordingly, assessing the impacts on FoRB cannot be limited to asking whether a church, temple, or cemetery has been relocated. The more fundamental question is whether the process of land acquisition and community displacement has simultaneously diminished or destroyed the conditions that have enabled people and communities to sustain their spiritual life and to exercise FoRB in practice.

The displacement of people and communities in Gia Binh has given rise to a spiritual life crisis, in which the institutions, spaces, and community networks that support the exercise of FoRB are all affected simultaneously. This dossier examines those impacts from a human rights perspective, with particular emphasis on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IN GIA BINH

The spiritual life of Gia Binh has evolved throughout the long history of village formation and remains deeply rooted in land, family, lineage, and community. It is not simply the sum of individual religions or belief systems, but rather an interwoven fabric of diverse spiritual practices coexisting within a shared cultural landscape. These practices have been sustained through religious, belief and spiritual institutions, enduring community relationships, and spaces that have been preserved across generations.

3.1. Spiritual Life Rooted in the Land

In Gia Binh, land is more than a place to live, cultivate, or earn a livelihood. It is the foundation upon which the spiritual life of individuals, families, and communities has been formed and sustained. Across this landscape, generations have built churches, temples, communal houses, shrines, ancestral halls, cemeteries, and communal gathering places. Over time, these places have given rise to customs, traditions, festivals, and spiritual practices that have been continuously maintained.

Each village is not merely a residential settlement but also a cultural and spiritual landscape with its own history, collective memory, and identity. Spiritual life therefore does not exist independently of the land; it is nurtured within the living environment of the community itself. The land becomes a repository of memory, tradition, and continuity between generations.

3.2. Religious Life

Gia Binh is home to a rich and diverse religious life, with multiple faith communities and religious institutions that have been established and sustained across generations. Churches, parishes, sub-parishes, Buddhist temples, and religious charitable institutions serve not only as places of worship but also as spaces where communities gather, support

one another, nurture faith, undertake charitable work, and strengthen social cohesion. Religious activities form an integral part of everyday life and are observed through liturgical calendars, religious festivals, commemorations, and community events. Religious life is therefore a natural part of daily living, closely connected to families, neighbours, and the communities in which people live.

3.3. Folk Belief Traditions

Alongside organized religious life, Gia Binh maintains a vibrant tradition of folk beliefs that reflects the long-standing cultural heritage of the Kinh Bac region. Communal houses, shrines, folk temples, roadside altars, village worship markers, and other belief institutions provide spaces for the worship of village guardian deities, local ancestors and benefactors, the Mother Goddess tradition, and many other forms of folk belief. These places also serve as venues for traditional festivals, community rituals, and cultural activities that shape the rhythm of local life. Folk belief traditions therefore express not only the spiritual convictions of local people but also help preserve cultural identity, strengthen community cohesion, and sustain the historical memory of each village.

3.4. Ancestor Veneration, the Deceased, and Lineage Institutions

Ancestor veneration is a defining feature of Vietnamese spiritual life and occupies a central place in Gia Binh. Family ancestral altars, ancestral halls, lineage temples, cemeteries, and ancestral graves are spaces closely associated with kinship, family memory, and continuity across generations. The care of ancestral graves, death anniversary observances, tomb-sweeping ceremonies, remembrance of ancestors, and lineage rituals are maintained as integral parts of both everyday life and community life. For each lineage, the ancestral hall serves not only as a place of worship but also as a repository of genealogies, family traditions, and values passed down through successive generations. Likewise, cemeteries and graves are not merely burial grounds but enduring expressions of collective memory and the continuing relationship between the living and their ancestors.

3.5. The Interconnected Nature of Religious, Belief, and Spiritual Life

One of the defining characteristics of spiritual life in Gia Binh is the close interconnection between religious practices, folk beliefs, and cultural traditions. Within the same community, people may participate in religious worship while also maintaining ancestor veneration, caring for ancestral graves, attending traditional festivals, and practising various forms of folk belief. These practices are not regarded as separate spheres of life but coexist naturally within the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Their interaction creates a rich and diverse spiritual life in which religious institutions, belief traditions, family lineages, and community networks collectively sustain spiritual values that have developed over many generations.

The spiritual life of Gia Binh is therefore nourished not only by individual beliefs but also by the wider cultural, social, and communal environment in which people live. The characteristics outlined above demonstrate that spiritual life in Gia Binh has been shaped through the close relationship between land, religious, belief and spiritual institutions, community relationships, and practices maintained across generations. Consequently, when people and communities lose their land, the impact extends far beyond changes in residence. It affects the entire environment that has sustained their spiritual life.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS

The displacement of people and communities through land loss in Gia Binh has not only altered where they live but has also diminished the conditions necessary for the exercise of FoRB in everyday life. At the same time, it has affected religious, belief and spiritual institutions, community relationships, and collective memory. From a human rights perspective, the central question is not only whether the institutions being destroyed will eventually be rebuilt, but also whether people and communities will continue to have the conditions necessary to exercise FoRB fully and continuously.

4.1. People and Communities Have Lost the Conditions Necessary to Exercise FoRB

In Gia Binh, the loss of land has resulted in the loss of the conditions that enable people and communities to exercise FoRB. Churches, temples, communal houses, shrines, cemeteries, ancestral halls, religious charitable institutions, and community spaces have been destroyed or removed. Communities have been dispersed, and families have been forced to leave places with which they have been connected for generations. What has been affected is not only the physical institutions themselves but also the entire set of conditions that has enabled FoRB to be exercised in everyday life. As those conditions disappear, the continued exercise of the right becomes increasingly vulnerable.

4.2. Spiritual Spaces Are Being Destroyed

Churches, temples, communal houses, shrines, cemeteries, ancestral halls, and other spiritual institutions are more than physical structures. They are spaces that preserve collective memory and provide the setting for religious, belief, and spiritual practices maintained over generations. Their dismantling, demolition, or clearance for the project causes harm that extends far beyond the loss of physical property. For affected people, witnessing the destruction of places closely connected to their spiritual life also means witnessing the loss of part of their history, collective memory, and community identity. Even if these institutions are reconstructed elsewhere, their original historical, cultural, and communal context cannot be fully recreated. What is being destroyed is the religious, belief and spiritual ecosystem that has enabled people and communities to exercise FoRB in their daily lives.

4.3. Religious, Belief, and Spiritual Practices Face the Risk of Disruption

FoRB includes the freedom to manifest and practise one's religion or belief in everyday life. When people and communities lose their land, activities such as attending Mass, participating in Buddhist worship, venerating ancestors, caring for ancestral graves, parish life, traditional festivals, charitable activities, community rituals, and other forms of spiritual practice become disrupted or significantly altered. Such disruption results not only from the loss of places where these practices occur but also from the dispersal of communities, changes in the living environment, and the disappearance of the conditions that have sustained these practices over time. The continuation of spiritual life after displacement therefore depends not only on individual belief but also on whether the conditions necessary for sustaining that way of life can be restored.

4.4. The Loss of Community Cohesion Increases the Vulnerability of FoRB

Religious, belief, and spiritual life in Gia Binh has long been sustained through families, lineages, parishes, faith communities, villages, and local communities. The loss of land simultaneously alters people's homes, living environments, and the social relationships that have nurtured their spiritual life. Communities that once celebrated festivals together, cared collectively for cemeteries, maintained traditional rituals, or worshipped together have become fragmented and dispersed. As these community bonds weaken, FoRB itself becomes more vulnerable because the exercise of this right is inseparable from the social and communal environments in which it is lived.

4.5. The Crisis Creates an Uncertain and Risk-Filled Future for Spiritual Life

The loss of land has not only removed the existing conditions that sustain spiritual life but has also created profound uncertainty regarding whether those conditions can be restored in the future. At the time this dossier was prepared, replacement religious, belief, and spiritual institutions had not yet been established. Many affected people did not know when their communities would become stable again, when religious and spiritual activities could resume normally, or whether traditions maintained across generations would continue into the future. While the conditions that once sustained spiritual life have already been

destroyed, equivalent conditions have yet to emerge. This gap significantly increases the risk that people and communities will be unable to exercise FoRB fully for an indeterminate period.

4.6. Gia Binh Demonstrates That FoRB Can Be Affected Through a Spiritual Life Crisis

The findings documented in Gia Binh demonstrate that FoRB is not affected only through policies or measures that directly regulate religious activities. The right may also become vulnerable when a crisis removes the conditions that have enabled people and communities to exercise it in everyday life. Religious, belief, and spiritual institutions have been affected. At the same time, the crisis has undermined the essential conditions that enable people and communities to sustain their spiritual life and continue exercising FoRB. This is the significance of approaching the present dossier through the concept of a spiritual life crisis. FoRB is assessed not only by the existence of legal protections or religious institutions but also by whether people and communities retain the practical ability to sustain their spiritual life after losing their land. Ensuring FoRB therefore cannot be separated from ensuring the conditions that make the exercise of that right possible in practice.

Table 3. Summary of the Impacts on FoRB

Affected Area	Observed Impact	Significance for FoRB
Spiritual spaces	Communal houses, temples, shrines, ancestral halls, cemeteries, and numerous other religious, belief and spiritual institutions fall within the land acquisition area or are affected by relocation.	Alters or reduces the physical spaces necessary for individuals and communities to practise religion or belief.
Individual and family spiritual life	Ancestor veneration, care of ancestral graves, family altars, and household belief practices are affected by displacement and temporary housing.	Disrupts or limits the exercise of FoRB in everyday life.
Community spiritual life	Traditional festivals, communal house activities, lineage gatherings, and community belief practices have been interrupted or significantly altered.	Affects the collective exercise of FoRB and weakens the continuity of religious and cultural traditions.
Community networks	Communities have become dispersed through land acquisition, temporary accommodation, and resettlement, weakening long-established social bonds.	Reduces the social conditions that sustain and transmit religious or belief practices across generations.
Conditions for exercising FoRB	Simultaneous changes in residence, spiritual spaces, and community structures transform the environment in which religion or belief is practised.	Demonstrates that the impact extends beyond relocating religious institutions to affecting the conditions necessary for exercising FoRB in practice.
Continuity of impacts	Impacts have been documented from planning and land acquisition through relocation, temporary accommodation, resettlement, and the continuing expansion of the project.	Demonstrates that impacts on FoRB constitute an ongoing process requiring assessment throughout the project's entire lifecycle rather than only at the point of land acquisition.

The findings of this dossier demonstrate that the impacts of the Gia Binh International Airport Project on FoRB do not arise solely from the relocation of religious institutions, belief sites, or cemeteries. More fundamentally, the project has simultaneously affected spiritual spaces, community relationships, and the social and cultural conditions that enable individuals and communities to sustain the practice of their religion or belief.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

The information documented in this dossier indicates that the impacts on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in Gia Binh are not confined to the period of land acquisition and displacement. They are likely to continue throughout the processes of resettlement and the rebuilding of community life.

5.1. Short-Term Risks

- Disruption to the religious, belief, and ancestor-veneration practices of individuals, families, and communities.
- Difficulties in maintaining spiritual spaces in temporary accommodation or at resettlement sites that remain incomplete.
- Increased anxiety, uncertainty, and feelings of loss within affected communities resulting from the sudden transformation of their living environment and spiritual spaces.

5.2. Medium-Term Risks

- Weakening of the relationships among families, lineages, and communities that sustain traditional religious and belief practices.
- Difficulties in restoring community religious, belief, and spiritual institutions and activities in new places of residence.
- The gradual erosion of customs, rituals, and forms of spiritual life historically rooted in traditional village communities.

5.3. Long-Term Risks

- The weakening of the continuity of spiritual life and religious and belief traditions passed from one generation to the next.
- The gradual loss of the social, cultural, and spatial conditions necessary for communities to exercise FoRB fully and effectively.
- An increased risk of grievances, disputes, or social tensions if the legitimate spiritual needs of affected people and communities are not adequately addressed during the implementation and completion of the project.

The risks identified above are not an inevitable consequence of all infrastructure development projects. They arise when land acquisition, displacement, and resettlement are carried out without simultaneously ensuring that individuals and communities retain the conditions necessary to continue exercising FoRB. Accordingly, the early identification of these risks, together with appropriate measures to prevent, mitigate, and remedy them, constitutes an essential requirement of a human rights-based approach to development projects.

6. STATE OBLIGATIONS

The implementation of development projects does not diminish the State's obligations to respect, protect, ensure, and remedy human rights. Where land acquisition and community displacement affect spiritual life and FoRB, these obligations must be fulfilled throughout the entire project cycle—from policy formulation and planning to land acquisition, displacement, and the eventual stabilization of people's lives in their new communities.

6.1. The Obligation to Respect FoRB

The obligation to respect extends beyond refraining from direct interference with people's religious or belief activities. It also requires that decisions concerning planning, land acquisition, and displacement avoid destroying or removing the conditions that enable people and communities to continue exercising FoRB in practice. In Gia Binh, this right encompasses not only people's ability to attend Mass, participate in Buddhist worship, or perform religious and belief rituals. It also includes their ability to maintain the spaces, institutions, and communities that have sustained their spiritual life. When these conditions are altered, compliance with the obligation to respect FoRB must be assessed not only by whether the right remains legally recognized but also by whether the conditions necessary for exercising that right continue to exist in practice.

6.2. The Obligation to Protect FoRB

The obligation to protect requires the State to take proactive measures to safeguard the conditions necessary for people and communities to continue exercising FoRB. Protection should not be limited to religious, belief, and spiritual buildings or institutions. It must also encompass the spaces in which the right is exercised, community institutions, social relationships, and the historical and cultural values that together sustain the spiritual life of local communities. Where land acquisition cannot be avoided, these elements should be properly identified and protected through appropriate measures before adverse impacts occur.

6.3. The Obligation to Ensure FoRB

The obligation requires the State to take all necessary measures to enable people and communities to continue exercising FoRB throughout the processes of land acquisition, displacement, and resettlement. This includes providing appropriate replacement institutions and spaces, maintaining the continuity of spiritual life, ensuring the continued functioning of religious and belief communities, and preventing prolonged interruptions in the exercise of the right.

6.4. The Obligation to Remedy

Where land acquisition and displacement have resulted in adverse impacts on FoRB, the State has an obligation to adopt effective measures to remedy those impacts by restoring the conditions that have been destroyed or taken away. Remedy extends beyond reconstructing religious, belief, and spiritual institutions. It also includes supporting communities in rebuilding their spiritual life, restoring the conditions necessary for people to continue exercising their rights, ensuring accessible and effective complaint and grievance mechanisms, and minimizing long-term impacts on future generations. The objective of remedy is to restore the ability of people and communities to sustain their spiritual life and to exercise FoRB fully, effectively, and continuously.

The obligations outlined above demonstrate that safeguarding FoRB in the context of land acquisition and community displacement is not only a human rights requirement but also a continuing responsibility of the State throughout the entire lifecycle of a development project. Fulfilling these obligations requires that the needs and aspirations of affected people and communities be heard, documented, and meaningfully taken into account so that the State's obligations can be implemented fully and effectively in practice.

7. ASPIRATIONS OF AFFECTED PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

The people of Gia Binh aspire for the conditions necessary to sustain a peaceful life—including their spiritual life—to be fully in place before they are required to relinquish their land and relocate. They do not wish to experience disruption followed by gradual recovery; rather, they seek a transition that is continuous, stable, and preserves the continuity of community life.

7.1. Meaningful Participation, Access to Information, and Accountability

Affected people wish to participate meaningfully throughout the processes of planning, land acquisition, and displacement. They seek timely, comprehensive, transparent, and accessible information regarding decisions that directly affect their lives, together with effective accountability mechanisms for decisions relating to land acquisition, displacement, and changes to the spiritual life of their communities.

7.2. Preserving Religious, Belief, and Spiritual Institutions and Spaces

Affected people wish to see churches, temples, communal houses, shrines, cemeteries, ancestral halls, religious charitable institutions, and other spiritual spaces preserved to the greatest extent possible throughout the implementation of the project. For local communities, preserving these institutions is not merely about protecting physical structures. It is about safeguarding the foundations of a spiritual life that has evolved over generations.

7.3. Maintaining Spiritual Communities

Affected people wish for their religious, belief, and village communities to remain intact after relocation. Preserving the cohesion of parishes, sub-parishes, Buddhist communities, family lineages, and local communities is regarded as essential to maintaining the continuity of religious, belief, and spiritual practices in everyday life.

7.4. Ensuring Replacement Institutions and Communities Are in Place Before Displacement

Affected people wish for replacement religious, belief, and spiritual institutions, together with the communities and conditions necessary to sustain spiritual life, to be fully established before existing institutions are dismantled or communities are required to relocate. Replacement should therefore involve more than constructing new buildings. It should ensure the continuity of spiritual life by preventing any gap between the loss of existing institutions and the establishment of the conditions necessary for people and communities to continue exercising FoRB.

7.5. Maintaining Spiritual Life Fully and Continuously

Affected people wish to continue participating in religious, belief, and spiritual practices—including attending Mass, participating in Buddhist worship, venerating ancestors, caring for ancestral graves, taking part in traditional festivals, participating in community activities, and engaging in charitable work—without interruption or deterioration resulting from changes to their living environment following land loss and displacement.

7.6. Preserving Cultural, Historical, and Spiritual Values

Affected people wish for the cultural, historical, and spiritual values that have been developed across generations to be preserved and passed on to future generations. Safeguarding institutions, collective memory, customs, and traditions is not only a matter of protecting cultural heritage. It is also essential to preserving community identity, social cohesion, and the spiritual foundations that have been nurtured over time.

The aspirations documented in Gia Binh reflect more than the desire of affected people and communities to maintain a peaceful life after losing their land. They also identify the conditions that people themselves regard as essential for the continued exercise of FoRB in

practice. These aspirations therefore provide an important foundation for developing rights-based solutions that respond simultaneously to the needs of affected communities and the obligations of the State.

8. RIGHTS-BASED SOLUTIONS

The following solutions are developed on the basis of the aspirations of affected people and communities, together with the obligations of the State, with the aim of helping to ensure FoRB in development projects involving land acquisition and community displacement.

8.1. Ensure Replacement Conditions Are in Place Before People and Communities Lose Their Land

Land acquisition should proceed only when the replacement conditions necessary for people and communities to maintain a peaceful life are already in place. With respect to spiritual life, this includes religious, belief, and spiritual institutions; community spaces; cemeteries; places for ancestor veneration; and all other conditions necessary to enable spiritual life to continue immediately following relocation.

8.2. Ensure the Continuity of Spiritual Life

The solution should extend beyond reconstructing or relocating religious, belief, and spiritual institutions. It must also ensure that the spiritual life of affected people and communities continues without interruption throughout the transition. Religious services, belief practices, ancestor veneration, the care of ancestral graves, traditional festivals, and community activities should all be able to continue without prolonged disruption or discontinuity.

8.3. Protect Communities Together with Their Spiritual Institutions

Relocation measures should protect not only physical structures but also the communities that have developed and remained connected over generations. Parishes, sub-parishes, Buddhist communities, family lineages, villages, and other religious or belief communities should be preserved together with the institutions and spiritual spaces that are integral to community life. Protecting communities is an essential condition for ensuring that spiritual life can continue after displacement.

8.4. Ensure Meaningful Participation

Affected people and communities should participate meaningfully throughout every stage of land acquisition, from access to information and public consultation to the selection of options and the monitoring of implementation. Decisions concerning the relocation, reconstruction, or establishment of religious, belief, and spiritual institutions should fully reflect the needs, aspirations, and lived experience of the communities directly affected.

8.5. Integrate Human Rights into Development Projects

The protection of human rights should become an integral component of the preparation, approval, and implementation of all development projects involving land acquisition. Alongside considerations of planning, engineering, implementation schedules, and investment efficiency, equal importance should be given to ensuring that the conditions necessary for people and communities to maintain a peaceful life are fully prepared in advance. This includes ensuring that the conditions necessary to sustain spiritual life and the exercise of FoRB are established before land acquisition and displacement take place.

8.6. Ensure Solutions Are Grounded in Rights, People's Needs, and State Obligations

Responses to projects involving land acquisition should not focus solely on remedying harm after it has occurred. Instead, they should be designed from the outset upon three mutually reinforcing foundations: the human rights recognized under international human rights law; the actual needs and aspirations of affected people and communities; and the

obligations of the State to respect, protect, ensure, and remedy human rights when they are adversely affected. Only when these three elements are integrated throughout the processes of planning, land acquisition, and displacement can development genuinely proceed in a manner that respects and protects human rights in practice.

The solutions proposed in this dossier seek to prevent, mitigate, and remedy the impacts on FoRB by safeguarding the conditions that sustain spiritual life. To be implemented effectively, these solutions should be translated into concrete recommendations for the institutions and actors responsible for planning, implementing, and overseeing development projects involving land acquisition and community displacement.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section summarizes the principal recommendations of the dossier according to the respective duty-bearers. The recommendations are based on the documented impacts, identified risks, the State's obligations under international human rights standards, and the aspirations of affected people and communities. Their purpose is to help ensure freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in the context of development projects involving land acquisition and community displacement.

Table 4. Recommendations by Duty-Bearer

Priority Area	Duty-Bearer	Key Recommendation	Objective
Prevent the further spread of the crisis	State	Urgently adopt measures to prevent, mitigate, and remedy the impacts on the spiritual life and FoRB of people and communities affected by land acquisition.	Limit the escalation of human rights impacts during project implementation.
Ensure the continuity of spiritual life	State	Proceed with land acquisition and displacement only when the replacement conditions necessary for spiritual life have been fully prepared and are in place.	Prevent interruptions in the exercise of FoRB throughout the transition.
Protect spiritual institutions and communities	State; Religious, belief, and spiritual communities	Preserve existing religious, belief, and spiritual institutions, spaces, and communities to the greatest extent possible. Relocation should occur only when appropriate replacement arrangements are available and the continuity of spiritual life can be ensured.	Maintain the conditions necessary for people and communities to continue exercising FoRB.
Ensure participation and access to information	State	Establish mechanisms for meaningful participation; ensure that affected people have timely, comprehensive, transparent, and accessible information; and provide accountability for decisions relating to land acquisition and displacement.	Ensure people's participation in decisions that directly affect their rights and interests.

Integrate human rights into development projects	State	Incorporate human rights impact assessments, including assessments of FoRB, into the preparation, approval, implementation, and monitoring of development projects involving land acquisition and community displacement.	Prevent similar human rights impacts in future development projects.
Preserve community cohesion	Religious, belief, and spiritual communities	Strengthen solidarity, mutual support, and cooperation in preserving religious, belief, cultural, historical, and spiritual values throughout displacement and the rebuilding of communities.	Help sustain the continuity of spiritual life and community identity.
International monitoring and support	International human rights and FoRB mechanisms	Continue monitoring the situation in Gia Binh; promote dialogue with the Government of Viet Nam; and support documentation, monitoring, and rights-based responses.	Strengthen international oversight and promote the protection of human rights in accordance with international standards.

9.1. Recommendations to the State

- Urgently adopt measures to prevent and contain the further spread of the crisis in Gia Binh, while promptly remedying the impacts that have already occurred or are continuing to occur, and addressing the underlying causes of the crisis.

- Suspend compulsory land acquisition and displacement until the replacement conditions necessary for affected people and communities have been fully established, ensuring that both everyday life and religious, belief, and spiritual life remain continuous throughout the transition.

- Ensure that affected people and communities participate meaningfully in decision-making processes, have access to comprehensive, transparent, and accessible information, and benefit from effective accountability mechanisms for all decisions that directly affect their lives and communities.

- Protect existing religious, belief, and spiritual institutions, symbols, and spaces. Relocation should proceed only after replacement institutions and the conditions necessary to sustain the religious, belief, and spiritual life of affected people and communities have been fully prepared.

- Develop and implement solutions grounded simultaneously in international human rights standards, the needs and aspirations of affected people and communities, and the State's obligations to respect, protect, ensure, and remedy human rights.

9.2. Recommendations to Religious, Belief, and Spiritual Communities

- Maintain solidarity and mutual support among communities throughout the processes of land acquisition, displacement, and community rebuilding.

- Exercise the right to peaceful collective action to protect religious, belief, and spiritual institutions, symbols, and spaces from further destruction until appropriate replacement institutions have been established and become fully operational.

- Work together to preserve and transmit the religious, belief, cultural, historical, and spiritual values that have been developed across generations.

9.3. Recommendations to International Human Rights and FoRB Mechanisms

- Continue monitoring developments in Gia Binh, including the impacts of land acquisition and displacement on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

- Promote dialogue with the Government of Viet Nam to ensure that human rights—particularly FoRB—are fully integrated into the planning, land acquisition, and community displacement processes.

- Support documentation initiatives, independent monitoring, and the development of rights-based responses aimed at preventing and addressing similar crises in future development projects.

10. BEYOND GIA BINH

Gia Binh is a specific case. Yet the findings documented in this dossier demonstrate that it is not merely the story of a single locality or a single infrastructure project. When people and communities lose their land, what is affected extends far beyond homes, livelihoods, or property. For many communities in Viet Nam, land also provides the foundation that connects religious, belief, and spiritual institutions, community relationships, historical memory, and practices that have evolved over generations. When these conditions are disrupted, the crisis extends beyond material loss and reaches the spiritual dimension of people's lives.

This dossier demonstrates that FoRB may be affected not only through direct restrictions on religious or belief activities, but also through a spiritual life crisis that diminishes or removes the conditions enabling people and communities to sustain their spiritual life. It therefore offers a broader perspective on safeguarding FoRB in the context of development projects involving land acquisition and community displacement.

Accordingly, Gia Binh raises issues that extend well beyond remedying the impacts of a single development project. It demonstrates that every project involving land acquisition and community displacement should fully assess its impacts on people's lives—including their spiritual life—from the earliest stages of policy formulation, planning, and implementation. Development should not be measured solely by construction progress, the scale of investment, or economic returns. It should also be measured by whether people and communities are able to maintain a peaceful life before, during, and after the transition.

The crisis in Gia Binh is still unfolding. Its impacts on affected people and communities will continue to emerge throughout the processes of displacement, community rebuilding, and the restoration of everyday life. For that reason, this dossier does not end with Gia Binh. Rather, Gia Binh stands as a reminder that every development project should be assessed not only by what it builds, but also by what people and communities are required to sacrifice in order for that development to become a reality.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE FROM THE SITE



The Ongoing Destruction of a Community's Spiritual Ecosystem in Gia Binh



The Holy Garden Cemetery before and after its relocation. In Vietnamese spiritual culture, the disturbance or relocation of graves is regarded as a profound spiritual taboo and is undertaken only with great caution and reverence.



After losing their land and homes, many families have also lost their household and ancestral places of worship, with no clear place to continue their religious and spiritual practices.



Places of worship and traditional spiritual sites—including communal houses, pagodas, temples, and shrines—within the airport project area were also demolished.



Religious symbols and places of worship within the Gia Bình Airport project area are scheduled for demolition and site clearance to make way for airport construction.



The future and the continuity of the community's spiritual life have become increasingly uncertain.