



Special Report: Persecution of the Dega (Montagnard) Peoples of Vietnam February 2022

The Dega are a group of peoples that live in the [Central Highlands region](#) of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The Dega were known as *Montagnards* by French colonial authorities, a term meaning “mountain dwellers.” The Dega are divided into sub-groups, including the Jarai, Rhade, Bahnar, and Koho. They are culturally and linguistically distinct from the majority *Kinh* (Vietnamese) population. The Dega have a long history of conflict with and discrimination at the hands of the Vietnamese majority. While officially known in Vietnamese as *người Thượng* (Mountain Dwellers), the Dega are often derogatorily referred to in Vietnam [as *mọi* or “Savages”](#).

During the Vietnam War, the Dega formed the BAJARAKA and later the [FURLO \(United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races\)](#) movements to advocate for their rights and autonomy from North and South Vietnam. The United States recruited thousands of Dega into [irregular military units](#) to fight against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong. Vietnamese communist forces targeted Dega communities for their association with the American military. In December 1967, for example, Viet Cong soldiers massacred over 200 Dega civilians in the village of [Đắk Sơn](#).

After the US withdrew from Vietnam, the [United States government](#) admitted only 3,000 Dega asylees, settling them mostly in [Greensboro, North Carolina](#). FURLO continued a 17-year insurgency against the Vietnamese Communists until the early 1990s. The Dega who fought for Americans were forced into “reeducation camps” and viewed as “traitors” in the People’s Republic of Vietnam. The Vietnamese government has launched a large-scale plan to “colonize” the Central Highlands with ethnic Kinh Vietnamese [settlers](#) to change the region’s demographics.

Due to efforts by American evangelical missionaries, many Dega people identify as Protestant Christians, an identity that sets them apart from the majority Buddhist and Catholic Vietnamese population. The Vietnamese government has labelled the Dega’s Christian beliefs as an [“evil way” religion](#) outside what the government calls “pure belief.” [Vietnamese security forces routinely harass](#), imprison, and torture Dega Christians. Many Dega have fled to neighboring [Cambodia](#). Both the Vietnamese and Cambodian governments try to prevent Dega from fleeing persecution.

Vietnamese government oppression of Dega people places Vietnam at **Stage 3: Discrimination, Stage 4: Organization, Stage 7: Polarization, and Stage 8: Persecution**.

Genocide Watch Recommends:

1. The United States should pressure the Vietnamese government to end its persecution against the Dega people in return for US development assistance in Dega areas.
2. The United States should honor the assistance that Dega soldiers gave Americans during the Vietnam War with pensions, medals, and asylum in the US.