

Pope accepts resignation of 57-year-old Hanoi archbishop

VATICAN CITY – Less than a week after a coadjutor archbishop was installed to assist him, 57-year-old Archbishop Joseph Ngo Quang Kiet of Hanoi resigned his post amid rumors that the Vietnamese government had told the Vatican the archbishop must go.

Pope Benedict XVI accepted Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet's resignation May 13. Archbishop Pierre Nguyen Van Nhon, 72, who had been welcomed as the coadjutor archbishop of Hanoi May 7, automatically became head of the archdiocese.

In an interview published on the Vietnamese bishops' website in April, Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet denied rumors that he had been pressured to step down after he asked Catholics in 2007 to pray for the government to return the former apostolic nunciature to the church. He also had criticized Hanoi city authorities for building a flower garden on the premises without local church approval.

"I am personally under no pressure from any side," the archbishop said in the interview, which was reported by UCA News, the Asian Catholic news agency.

The archbishop reportedly had been suffering from stress and insomnia. In announcing his resignation, the Vatican cited a norm of canon law that asks bishops to offer their resignations when facing "ill health or some other grave cause" that would prevent them from carrying out their ministry.

AsiaNews, a Rome-based Catholic news agency, reported May 11 that the archbishop would step down and hypothesized that he would do so because Vietnam's communist government made his ouster a condition for launching full diplomatic relations with the Vatican and for allowing the pope to visit Vietnam in January 2011.

For at least two years, AsiaNews said, Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet "has been the focus of a regime campaign to have him removed. Indeed, the prelate has always supported the requests and the prayers of the faithful of Hanoi who suffer

oppression, expropriation of land, churches and cemeteries, along with gratuitous violence.”

Also May 13, the Vatican announced that Pope Benedict had appointed Dominican Father Paul Nguyen Thai Hop, 65, to be the new bishop of Vinh. The bishop-designate, an expert in ethics and Catholic social teaching, has been a professor at the Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City, as well at the Dominican Study Center.

He succeeds Bishop Paul-Marie Cao Dinh Thuyen, who celebrated his 83rd birthday in January.