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Mr. SMITH of New Jersey.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank, first of all, you for your very kind remarks, but also for moving this legislation very swiftly through the full committee, along with Eliot Engel's full support, and the chairwoman emeritus, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Thank you for your steadfast support for human rights, now presiding over this session.

And, Mr. Chairman, I do want to thank you for being a champion on behalf of the dissidents, the bloggers, the religious dissidents, political and religious in Vietnam, who suffer daily beatings at the hands of an increasingly absurd and worsening dictatorship.

Vietnam is in a race to the bottom with some of the dictatorships around the world, including Cuba, including China, Somalia, and other places where people's human rights are systematically trashed by the regimes.

I do rise to ask, respectfully, that Members support the Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2013. The purpose of this bipartisan legislation is simple: to send a clear, strong, and compelling message to the

increasingly repressive communist regime in power in Vietnam that says that the United

States is serious about combating human rights abuse in Vietnam.

Underscoring the worsening situation in Vietnam, John Sifton of Human Rights Watch testified at a June 4 hearing that I chaired, and he noted that "in the first few months of 2013, more people have been convicted in political trials as in the whole of the last year." And that has only gotten worse as each week passes in Vietnam.

Reporters Without Borders have put out their numbers, and there's at least 35 netizens, bloggers, journalists who write online who have been incarcerated by this dictatorship.

I'll never forget, on one particular trip to Vietnam, I met with Dr. Pham Son; I met with his wife. He was in prison. And what was his crime? He went on U.S. Embassy Hanoi, took an essay entitled, "What is Democracy?" translated it, and rebroadcast, resent it out online, and for that he got a multi-year sentence in jail.

I met with his wife, who lived in great fear that they would go after her as well. And certainly, when I had dinner with her one night, sitting as far away as Chairman Royce, at the next table at a hotel were three bully boys from the--three thugs from the secret police of Vietnam, very, very visibly standing up and taking pictures to let us know that they were watching. Of course, I took their picture as well. But that's the kind of intimidation campaign this wonderful wife of a dissident was experiencing.

Boat People at the SOS suggest that there are well over 625 political prisoners and religious prisoners, as we meet here tonight, who are suffering. And of course that number often goes up. One might be let out, two more incarcerated by this dictatorship.

Madam Speaker, H.R. 1897 is designed to promote the development of freedom of democracy in Vietnam. The bill will bring much-needed scrutiny to a seriously deteriorating situation. It stipulates that the United States can increase nonhumanitarian assistance to Vietnam above the 2012 levels only if the President is able to certify that the Government of Vietnam has made substantial progress in establishing a democracy and promoting human rights, including respecting religious freedom and the release of political prisoners and religious prisoners, repealing and revising laws that criminalize peaceful dissent, respecting human rights of members of all ethnic groups--there's an enormous amount of racism in Vietnam, particularly directed at people who happen to be Montagnard, and others--taking all appropriate steps, including the prosecution of government officials to end government complicity in that nefarious practice called human trafficking. There are also very clear benchmarks articulated in the legislation.

Madam Speaker, in the last 4 months alone, on April 11 and June 4, I've held two more congressional hearings on this deteriorating situation. We heard stories about individuals and groups who are being persecuted in a variety of ways. Their testimony confirmed that religious, political, and ethnic persecution has worsened, and that there is complicity by leadership, by the people who are in the Government of Vietnam, in human trafficking.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, in 2013, in their report, noted:

The Government of Vietnam continues to expand control over all religious activities, severely restricting independent religious practice and to repress individuals and religious groups it views as challenging their authority.

The Commission says very candidly that Vietnam ought to be a country of particular concern--a CPC designation--pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Unfortunately, that was removed by President Bush--a misguided move on his part--in 2006, when it was thought that the bilateral trade agreement and the permanent normal trading relations might lead to a matriculation from a dictatorship to a democracy. Things actually have gotten worse since this government got this trade benefit. Rights have suffered and people--real casualties--have endured unspeakable hardships.

Mr. Speaker, on several human rights trips to Vietnam, I have met, as has Chairman Royce and other Members--and I know when you meet these people you are forever moved--courageous leaders who struggle, sacrifice and endure numbing hardships, including torture, to promote

fundamental human rights in their beloved country. Many of these remarkable individuals hail from virtually every denomination of faith, whether it be Christian, Falun Gong, or Buddhists, and suffer, again, horrifically because of their faith.

I met with the Venerable Thich Quang Do, under pagoda arrest--a great Buddhist leader who has been relegated to his pagoda. He couldn't step one foot outside of that pagoda without the secret police rushing in. He told me if he took one step out with me to say good-bye, there would be an onslaught of these bully boys who would push and shove or mistreat him.

I met with Father Ly when he was under house arrest before being re-arrested. He was a great democracy activist who was being so callously mistreated by this dictatorship. And he is only one of many.

It is not just the religious leaders in particular or individuals who are victimized by the government. Entire communities are also targeted by the regime. Mr. Tien Tran testified at our April 11 meeting and told my subcommittee of the brutality experienced by the Con Dau Catholic Parish, which has been repressed like you can't believe, Mr. Speaker. Individuals have been beaten to a pulp. Some have died. And they have confiscated their property. So they're kleptomaniacs as well.

Also, at the April 11 meeting we heard from the sister of a Vietnamese woman who was forced to work in a brothel in Russia with 14 other Vietnamese women. When there was an effort made by the Russian Government to liberate those women, it was the Embassy of Vietnam in Moscow that tipped off the traffickers--because they were complicit with them--to ensure that these

women were not liberated but continued to be hurt by the traffickers. There was another one dealing with women who were trafficked to Jordan. Those officials of the Vietnamese Government were complicit in that as well.

Again, that's only the tip of the iceberg of this terrible complicity with heinous crimes against women.

I think the State Department report on trafficking was a good one, but they made a gross exception when it came to Vietnam, and actually improved their grade, when the information even in the narrative about Vietnam and the TIP report would have suggested otherwise.

I'm the prime author of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and worked to create those minimum standards. It's appalling that Vietnam is not where it ought to be, a Tier 3 country, an egregious violator subject to sanctions.

This will be the fourth time, if this bill passes, Mr. Speaker, that we've been able to get the Vietnam Human Rights Act passed. In 2004, 2007, and last year, 2012, iterations of this bill have gotten over to the Senate, only to die through holds and other very non-democratic means of suppressing the will of the Senate in working on this bill. I hope that changes.

We have seen a deterioration, as my colleagues and I have all pointed out tonight, in the human rights situation in Vietnam. It is time to stand with the oppressed people who are yearning to be free in Vietnam and to stand up against this dictatorship. It's time to meet with them, talk with them, and talk to President Sang, who was here last week to meet with President Obama, and lay down very specific benchmarks on simple respect

for the fundamental liberties of people in Vietnam who just yearn to be free and to experience their God-given rights.