

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 19, 2016

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to urge that during your upcoming visit to Vietnam you raise concerns with the Vietnamese leadership over their government's pattern of serious violations of internationally recognized human rights, especially as Vietnam aggressively seeks to expand trade and other relationships with the United States.

After twenty years of diplomatic relations with the United States and billions of dollars in U.S. trade and investment, the government of Vietnam continues to treat its own citizens – particularly those who share our democratic values – in ways that suggest a more direct approach is needed. Most troubling is that in recent times, the government appears to step up its crackdown against dissidents and independent religious communities again. Examples include the recent arrest of human rights lawyer and former prisoner of conscience Nguyen Van Dai, the five-year prison sentence against Basam Nguyen Huu Vinh, the torture to death of a couple of Montagnard Christian leaders, and forced renunciation of faith aimed at members of the Christian, Buddhist, Khmer Krom Buddhist, Cao Dai, Montagnard, and Hmong communities.

As the United States government prepares to enter an even closer relationship with the government of Vietnam, your Administration should insist that our new partner unconditionally free all of the hundreds of political prisoners and other prisoners of conscience it now holds, such as Father Nguyen Van Ly, Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, Bui Van Trung, Nguyen Van Minh, Bui Thi Minh Hang, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, Doan Huy Chuong, Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung, Nguyen Huu Vinh, and Nguyen Van Dai.

The Vietnamese government should repeal all laws and administrative decrees that deny freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly – such as the laws criminalizing “propaganda against the state” and “taking advantage of democratic freedoms to injure the national unity” – and enact laws codifying and protecting the fundamental human rights the government now routinely violates. We hope you will also make clear that the government must stop cracking down on pro-democracy bloggers and others who use the Internet to exercise their freedom of expression.

It is also essential that the Vietnamese government eliminate the onerous requirement that all religious organizations submit to close supervision by the government as a precondition for worship services and other activities. The latest draft law on religion being considered in the Vietnamese National Assembly, which would further impede independent religious communities, should be redrafted to recognize that freedom of religion is a basic right that is not conditional on registration with and approval by the government. Otherwise it would be better for that draft law to be simply abandoned.

Similarly, we ask that you urge the Vietnamese government, by introducing the country's first ever law on association, to permit the existence of genuinely independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For decades the government has created a growing number of synthetic NGOs controlled by the Communist Party and its constituent entities including the "Fatherland Front", the "Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations" (VUSTA) and the "Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations" (VUFO).

The Vietnamese government must also allow Vietnamese workers to form labor unions that are truly independent of the government and of the Communist Party. It must end the practice of forced labor and prosecute officials of state-owned labor export companies that are involved in human trafficking. The Vietnamese government engages in trafficking in persons through forced labor in "rehabilitation" centers, detention centers, and prisons, as well as by sending its citizens into modern-day slavery in countries around the world and punishing victims who object to such treatment.

Finally, the Vietnamese government should agree to a process to resolve claims for compensation made by U.S. citizens whose property has been confiscated. The government has illegally confiscated the real and personal property of many Vietnamese-Americans and this practice continues to the present day.

We hope you will make clear to the Vietnamese authorities that further expansion of the United States trade and security relationship with their government will not be acceptable to your administration, to Congress, or to the American people unless it is contingent upon significant, verifiable and irreversible improvements in human rights practices.

During your visit, we call on you to meet with leaders of independent and unrecognized religious communities, human rights activists, pro-democracy advocates and political dissidents. Such meetings would show our government's recognition of and

moral support for civil society and send a clear message to the Vietnamese government about your Administration's intention to engage not only the government but also the people of Vietnam.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



REP. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress



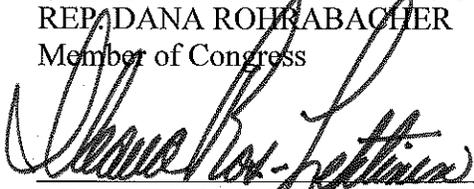
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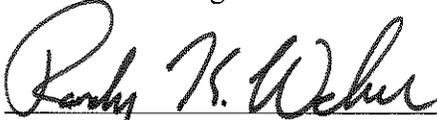
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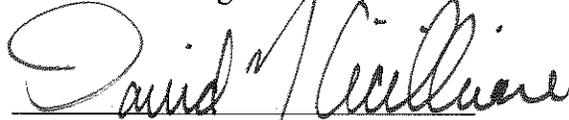
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