

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

1540 Kuser Road, Suite A9
Hamilton, NJ 08619-3828
(609) 585-7878
TTY (609) 585-3650

108 Lacey Road, Suite 38A
Whiting, NJ 08759-1331
(732) 350-2300

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

<http://chrissmith.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEES:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, AND
HUMAN RIGHTS

CHAIRMAN

WESTERN HEMISPHERE
SUBCOMMITTEE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE

CHAIRMAN

CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE
COMMISSION ON CHINA

CHAIRMAN

DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Mark-up of H.R. 1410, the Vietnam Human Rights Act

*Africa, Global Health and Human Rights Subcommittee
Excerpts of Remarks by Chairman Chris Smith
February 8, 2012*

As the Subcommittee heard from several witnesses at a hearing just last month on January 24th, the Vietnamese government continues to be an egregious violator of a broad array of human rights. The testimony we heard confirmed that religious, political and ethnic persecution continue and in many cases is increasing, and that Vietnamese officials continue to lay out the welcome mat for forced labor and sex traffickers.

In particular, we heard from a Vietnamese woman who courageously fought for her own rights and those of her co-workers when they were trafficked to Jordan with the complicity of Vietnamese government officials. We also heard from Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang, the executive director of Boat People SOS, who recently travelled to Thailand to investigate human rights violations in Vietnam. Dr. Thang provided extensive details about current labor trafficking, forced labor, and disturbing denials by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees of Vietnamese labor and sex trafficking victims.

In addition, our witnesses provided deeply disturbing photographs of evidence of torture, and showed a video of the Vietnamese military destroying an entire village of Hmong Christians.

It is imperative that the United States Government send an unequivocal message to the Vietnamese regime that it must end its human rights abuses against its own citizens. For this reason, I reintroduced the Vietnam Human Rights Act and am bringing it before the Subcommittee for its consideration today.

The Foreign Affairs Committee adopted my amendment on the promotion of human rights in Vietnam to H.R. 2583, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2012, in July 2011, that substantially reflects the bill before us today.

The purpose of H.R. 1410 is to promote the development of freedom and democracy in Vietnam. It seeks to do so primarily by stipulating that the United States can increase its assistance to Vietnam above FY2011 levels only when 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 freedom of religion and releasing all religious prisoners;
- Respecting rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, and releasing all political prisoners, independent journalists, and labor activists;
- Repealing and revising laws that criminalize peaceful dissent, independent media, unsanctioned religious activity, and nonviolent demonstrations, in accordance with international human rights standards;
- Respecting the human rights of members of all ethnic groups; and
- Taking all appropriate steps, including prosecution of government officials, to end any government complicity in human trafficking.

In addition to such a certification, the United States would have to increase funding for human rights and rule of law programming in Vietnam in an amount equal to or greater than the increase in non-humanitarian assistance.

The legislation includes a waiver of the increase certification requirement for any year in which the President determines that increased non-humanitarian assistance to the Vietnamese Government would promote the purpose of the Act or would otherwise be in the national interest of the United States.

The bill would not prevent increased funding to the Vietnamese Government for disaster relief, food, medicine, refugees, and efforts to combat HIV/AIDS.

I ask my colleagues to join me in affirming our commitment to promoting democracy and respect for human rights in Vietnam, and to support H.R. 1410, the Vietnam Human Rights Act.