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# “Examining Ongoing Human Rights Abuses in Vietnam”

*Africa, Global Health and Human Rights Subcommittee  
Excerpts of Remarks by Chairman Chris Smith  
January 24, 2012*

Thank you for joining us for this important hearing to examine the ongoing human rights situation in Vietnam.

The Vietnamese government continues to be an egregious violator of a broad array of human rights. Our distinguished witnesses who are joining us here today will provide a detailed account; I would like to highlight just a few areas of grave concern.

Despite the State Department’s decision in 2006 to remove Vietnam from the list of Countries of Particular Concern as designated pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act, Vietnam, in fact, continues to be among the worst violators of religious freedom in the world. According to the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom’s 2011 Annual Report, “[t]he government of Vietnam continues to control religious communities, severely restrict and penalize independent religious practice, and brutally repress individuals and groups viewed as challenging its authority.” I agree with USCIRF’s conclusion that Vietnam should be designated a CPC country.

The State Department’s designation of Vietnam as a Tier 2 Watch List country with respect to the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking also needs to be critically examined. The Department’s 2011 Trafficking in Persons Report states not only that Vietnamese women and children are being sexually exploited, but that there are severe labor abuses occurring as well – with the government’s complicity. The Report acknowledges that state-affiliated and state-licensed labor export companies engage in numerous trafficking-related violations, including fraud and the charging of illegal commissions for overseas

employment. There also are documented cases of recruitment companies ignoring pleas for help from workers in exploitative situations.

As the sponsor of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, I am deeply disturbed that the Tier Rankings are not being better utilized by our State Department to pressure Vietnam to correct the trafficking abuses occurring within its government, not to mention those in the private sector.

We are particularly privileged to have Ms. Phong-Anh Vũ with us to testify about the horrific suffering she endured when she was trafficked from Vietnam to Jordan. It is also troubling to hear about the abuse that she and others have continued to endure at the hands of the Vietnamese Government even after their escape from their traffickers. Ms. Vũ, I greatly admire your courage and the Subcommittee is most appreciative of your presence and your testimony.

I met other courageous individuals during my last trip to Vietnam who were struggling for fundamental human rights in their country. Unfortunately, many of them continue to be persecuted by the government. Father Ly is in prison and is suffering from very poor health, and Attorney Nguyen Van Dai remains under house arrest.

Despite this dismal status for human rights in Vietnam, there are new opportunities for the United States to exert pressure on the government to cease these abuses.

H.R. 1410, the Vietnam Human Rights Act which I introduced last year – and which passed the House previously in 2007 - would provide significant motivation to the government of Vietnam to respect its international human rights obligations. It would prohibit any annual increase in the amount of non-humanitarian assistance that the United States provides to Vietnam unless there is an equal or greater increase in the amount of assistance for human rights and democracy promotion programming in Vietnam.

An increase in non-humanitarian assistance would also be prohibited unless Vietnam satisfies certain requirements, including substantial progress toward respect for the freedom of religion and freedom of expression and assembly, respect for ethnic and minority rights, and allowing Vietnamese nationals free and open access to United States refugee programs. The government would also have to end its complicity in severe forms of human trafficking.

In addition, this legislation would reaffirm the United States' commitments:

- to overcoming the jamming of Radio Free Asia by the Vietnamese Government,
- to engaging in cultural exchanges in a manner that promotes freedom and democracy in Vietnam, and
- to offer refugee resettlement to Vietnamese nationals who have been deemed ineligible solely due to administrative errors or for other reasons beyond their control.

I thank all of our witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee, and we look forward to hearing your testimony.