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**Congress of the United States**  
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**Vietnam Human Rights Day**

*U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04)*  
*Excerpts of Remarks*  
*May 11, 2017*

I would like to begin by thanking everyone for coming here today to be a part of the 23rd Commemoration of Vietnam Human Rights Day. A special thanks is owed to Dr. Quan, for organizing this event this year, and every year.

I understand this is the final year Dr. Quan is organizing this event. I want to thank him personally for his tireless work—for democracy and human rights in Vietnam. We owe him and his brother, Dr. Dan Que (Dan Quay) a real debt of gratitude for their decades of service to the cause of human rights in Vietnam.

The unified voice of the Vietnamese community serves as a necessary conscience for this Congress. You have helped us understand the importance of freedom in Vietnam and inspired us to continue to push for meaningful reforms. Your voice is needed now more than ever. With President Trump now in place and his administration taking shape, we are now at an important time in U.S.-Vietnam relations.

President Trump has already spoken by telephone and sent a letter to the Vietnamese Prime Minister. There are visits being scheduled and such high-level meetings represent real opportunities to press for the release of political prisoners, respect for religious groups, and free expression.

As the new administration looks to see what has happened before, it will see that lifting trade barriers and expanding diplomatic engagement with Vietnam has not brought about significant human rights improvements.

Nguyen Van Dai and other important dissident voices continue be jailed and despite the façade of a new law on religion and belief, the Communist party continues to control religious groups, and all groups for that matter.

The American relationship with Vietnam should not just be about just about trade deficits and military hardware. Ideals this country was founded on—like religious freedom and free expression—need to be front and center in talks.

There are those who say that an emphasis on “values” creates obstacles to advance U.S. national interests. But an emphasis on hard realism misses the point about the connection between freedom and fair trade and between the rule of law and international security.

There is a direct connection between U.S. power and prosperity and the advance of justice, human rights, and the rule of law. U.S. leadership is required to demonstrate that principles and interests are not incompatible, but necessary for better relations.

No government that represses its own people or restricts fundamental freedoms can be a trusted ally of the United States.

No government that censors the Internet or tortures and jails dissidents can be trusted with generous trade or security benefits.

The President must make sure the Vietnamese Government understands that major improvements are necessary for a strong and healthy partnership between our countries. He should make clear that the further expansion of trade benefits and security partnerships are conditioned on significant, verifiable, and irreversible improvements in human rights and democratic freedoms in Vietnam.

I am again preparing legislation that ensures progress on human rights is a centerpiece of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship.

In the past, with your help, the Vietnam Human Rights Act has passed the House. By passing legislation that prioritizes human rights in Vietnam, Congress can send an important message on behalf of the American people.

The Communist Party is not Vietnam’s future, that future lies with Nguyen Van Dai and the many other advocates of political reform and human rights who seek our freedoms more than our trade.

U.S. policy must send the unmistakable message to the Government of Vietnam that human rights improvements are fundamental to better relations, critically linked to our mutual economic and security interests, and will not be ignored or bargained away.

Again, I would like to thank everyone for traveling to be here. Together, we have been fighting for human rights in Vietnam for many years, but we must continue the fight because there is still so much to do.