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The Honorable Janet Nguyen
Supervisor, First District
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House Committee on Foreign Affairs
July 9, 2014
“Spotlighting Human Rights in Southeast Asia”



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Good morning Chairman Royce and Members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs,

It is my honor to appear here today before this esteemed Committee to comment on the continuing violations of religious freedom and individual rights in Vietnam. In the end, I request your assistance in fighting for greater respect for personal liberty by the Government of Vietnam and the release of human rights advocates, who are currently imprisoned throughout Vietnam, by supporting H.R. 4254, as introduced by Chairman Royce, which resolution I had the distinct privilege of assisting in the drafting of.

Despite Vietnam's status as one of the U.S.'s Normal-Trade partners, Vietnam has not reduced its oppression of its people, including journalists, dissidents, or simply human rights advocates. As a County Supervisor whose district encompasses the Little Saigon Community, which is the largest Vietnamese Community outside of Vietnam, I speak for many in voicing our concerns about the continued political oppression which exists in Vietnam and hope that we in the U.S. will stand up and demand that Vietnam respect the basic tenets of freedom and democracy that we, as a nation, expect from our trade partners.

As a beacon of civil liberties around the world, our country has never shied away from its commitment to basic human rights. We will not stand idly by while tyrants repress their people, least of all from our trade partners. Access to our economy and the opportunity for financial benefits that access presents must be earned through compliance with the basic rules of human dignity and fairness we live by. Unfortunately, Vietnam has continued to push the limits of our tolerance in this regard. Almost four decades after the Vietnam War, Vietnam has continued its use of force, intimidation and imprisonment to silence and oppress its people.

The incarceration of songwriter Tri Minh Vo (aka Viet Khang), who was sentenced to four years in prison, is a prime example of the political oppression that the Vietnamese People must continue to live under. There are also other examples of oppression, illegal detention, and suppression of free speech and religious figures throughout Vietnam, such as the Venerable Thich Quang Do, Reverend Nguyen Van Ly, Reverend Nguyen Cong Chinh, Blogger Dieu Cay Nguyen Van Hai, as well as countless other human rights fighters. We believe the U.S. alone has the unique power to effectuate political change in Vietnam, and for that reason we appeal to the Committee to lend your voice to this noble cause.

As the highest-ranking Vietnamese American elected official in California, I humbly ask that you support H.R. 4254. This action will send a clear message to the Government of Vietnam and the officials engaging in violation of human rights that the United States has no tolerance

for intolerance and political suppression and that we will hold those officials personally accountable for their actions. I hereby submit a representative number of signatures from community members to show the overwhelming support for H.R. 4254. I also submit a list of names of Vietnamese citizens who, we believe, have violated the basic human rights of other Vietnamese citizens. A case summary with evidence of each of their violations is included within for your review. Given their blatant disregard for human rights, these individuals should not be allowed entry into the United States of America, nor should they have the ability to use our financial system for their own benefit. Therefore, I urge you to consider adopting the 'List of Individuals Who Are Complicit in Human Rights Abuses' under H.R. 4254 and adding these individuals to that list for sanctions.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the concerns of Vietnamese everywhere that despite international condemnation, China has become more militarily aggressive against its neighbors over the past few years. China's aggression has escalated and now includes the violation of Vietnam's territorial rights and capsizing of a Vietnamese fishing boat on May 26, 2014 with 10 fishermen on board. This conduct is unacceptable and poses as a threat to the stability of the region.

These actions are hostile and detrimental to the sovereign interests of Vietnam. Examples of these actions include China deploying an illegal deep-water oil rig in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone, ramming into a Vietnamese private fishing boat and firing a water cannon at a Vietnamese naval patrol ship which injured several sailors. Given China's increasing aggression, I am fearful that these aggressions could soon result in the loss of life and escalate tension in the South Asia Sea. I ask that this Committee also look into this issue as it may significantly impact our national interests in the Pacific Rim.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am available if you have any questions.