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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA)**, Chairman
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and
International Organizations Hearing:
“Vietnam: Why Religious Freedom and Human Rights Are Critical to U.S.
National Interests”
May 25, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you, Chairman Smith, for calling this important hearing. As we all recall, we had a similar hearing last year. I wish that there was no need to revisit these critical issues, but unfortunately, Vietnam’s one-party communist state continues to oppress its citizens and deny them fundamental human rights.

That is why we are here today. We do have a growing relationship with Vietnam, particularly in the security and trade arenas, but human rights are a core value to us, and we cannot segregate them from our on-going engagement with that government.

I am grateful to our witnesses for participating in this hearing. They will detail for us the many cases of violence and intimidation directed by the state towards religious practitioners from many faiths. In addition to those crimes – and there is no other word for it than crimes – the state’s efforts to control every aspect of religious practice is a continuous violation of human rights, one with no end in sight.

The Vietnamese Prime Minister arrives next week to meet with President Trump. Alongside everything else that is discussed, the United States must call for the government of Vietnam to respect its people’s fundamental freedoms. Among these, none can be more important and more personal than the right to freedom of religion. Yet in Vietnam, the state continues to intimidate and harass citizens for nothing more than attempting to practice their religion freely and openly.

Almost two decades ago, I met with the Venerable Thich Quang Do, now the Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. Sadly, over all of those years, he remains under house arrest, still persecuted by the communist government. And Thich Quang Do is not alone. Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, who has suffered severe beatings at the hands of the police and security apparatus, has for the last five years remained behind bars on the questionable charges of “undermining national security.”

What we call for today, and what I urge the administration to call for in its meeting with the Prime Minister, is respect for religious freedom.

The Vietnamese Constitution specifically provides for it. One must ask, then, why officials can obstruct and interfere with this constitutionally guaranteed right to worship freely? We must ask further, that if this constitutional right can be ignored, what weight can we give to any other constitutional or legal rights in Vietnam?

I am pleased that U.S.-Vietnam relations are warming, and I hope for a stronger and more productive relationship between our countries. However, continued cooperation and improvements in our relationship must be predicated on a mutual respect for human rights and the rule of law. It is who we are. It is what I hope they are, but it is up to them to show it.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for bringing attention to this important issue. I yield back.