



VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY OF GREATER FORTSMITH/ AR

P.O. BOX 4318 FORT SMITH, AR 72914

Fort Smith, September 24, 2013

Dear Senator Boozman,

On behalf of the Vietnamese-American community here in Fort Smith, Arkansas, we would like to express our sincere gratitude for your tireless efforts on behalf of human rights for the people of Vietnam, especially with your sponsoring and introducing to the Senate the Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2013, which was passed recently with overwhelming bipartisan support in the United States House of Representatives.

On August 10, 2013, the United Nations issued a statement decrying that human rights in Vietnam have suffered a major setback. Vietnamese people continue to be repressed by the Communist regime, most notably in their freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the freedom to assemble and to protest. Vietnamese netizens expressing political dissent are threatened and imprisoned, and the most notable case is that of Viet Khang, a blogger, song writer, and political activist who was arrested by the Communist regime of Vietnam on December 23, 2011, for the crimes of writing two patriotic songs (Who Are You/Anh La Ai, and Where is my Vietnam/Viet Nam Toi Dau), encouraging patriotic Vietnamese to rise up in opposition against the Chinese incursions of two Vietnamese Islands, the Paracel and Spratly Islands. Viet Khang was later sentenced to four years in prison. More than 30 other Vietnamese bloggers and netizens are currently incarcerated by the Vietnamese government, simply for peacefully expressing dissenting opinions. These men and women were sentenced to 2 to 16 years in prison. Finally, Vietnamese citizens are subjected to an atmosphere where law enforcement officials harass and threaten those identified with differing political views from the ruling party.

In addition to the increasingly repressive actions by the government of Vietnam to bar its people from the basic human rights of freedom of speech and religion, Vietnamese citizens live in danger of having their land, which they rely on for subsistence, taken away by government officials, without due process, under pretenses of economic development. This leads to a financial crisis for many without recourse. On July 6, 2013, the Oslo Times published an article about the land crisis in Vietnam, stating that, "All land in the communist nation is owned by the state and usage rights are frequently opaque, allowing corrupt local officials and well-connected businessmen to seize land with impunity, according to activists." (<http://www.theoslotimes.com/vietnams-land-rights-crisis/>) Taken together, these actions have shown that those in power in Vietnam express very little regard for the Vietnamese people, and actively repress the basic rights of its citizens.

The Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2013 is a much needed step in the right direction, to express to the Vietnamese government the United States' resolve to champion human rights, not only in Vietnam, but in all corners of the world. We are grateful to you, Senator Boozman, for your parts in this cause.

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VINH PHAM, PRESIDENT