

ALAN LOWENTHAL
47TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

108 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE (202) 225-7924
FAX (202) 225-7926

100 WEST BROADWAY STREET
WEST TOWER, SUITE 600
LONG BEACH, CA 90802
PHONE (562) 436-3828
FAX (562) 437-6434

www.lowenthal.house.gov
facebook.com/RepLowenthal
twitter.com/RepLowenthal

October 5, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to request that you exercise your authority under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to return Vietnam to the list of "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPC) for religious freedom.

Vietnam was removed from this list in November 2006 because of supposed progress in religious freedom. In the nearly ten years since Vietnam was no longer considered a CPC, however, the Vietnamese government has demonstrated a lack of progress on respecting religious freedom and has time and again violated its citizens' fundamental right to freely practice their religion.

Recent incidents have shone a spotlight on the government's mistreatment of worshippers of all faiths. Nguyen Cong Chinh, a Lutheran pastor, has been imprisoned since 2012. His wife, Ms. Tran Thi Hong, was detained and beaten by security forces in April following a meeting with U.S. Ambassador at-Large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein.

Just last month, government authorities demolished the Lien Tri Buddhist Temple in Saigon, an important symbol for the community with over 70 years of history. In addition, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), whose leader Thich Quang Do remains under house arrest, continues to be subjected to restrictions on its freedom to operate and practice. The temple has long served as a meeting place and shelter for human rights activists, civil society, and NGOs.

Meanwhile, Vietnam has continued work on a draft law on religion with the potential to increase government interference in religious activities and oversight of religious organizations. Designating Vietnam as a CPC would provide incentive to the policymakers drafting the law on religion to respect religious freedoms in the new law.

The United States International Commission on Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent and bipartisan commission of the federal government, has called for Vietnam to be reinstated as a CPC in their annual report every year since Vietnam was removed. The time has long past to

reinstate Vietnam on the list of Countries of Particular Concern given its troubling record of curbing

We thank you for your attention to this matter and urge you to once again designate Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom.

Sincerely,



ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress



EDWARD R. ROYCE
Member of Congress