

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 1, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson  
United States Secretary of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson,

As members of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam, we congratulate you on your confirmation as United States Secretary of State. We write to highlight some of the challenges in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, a key regional power in Southeast Asia and a potential economic and strategic partner for the United States.

Over four decades after the end of the Vietnam War and nearly 22 years after normalization of relations with the United States, Vietnam remains a one-party communist state with little tolerance for dissent.

Nearly two million Americans were born in Vietnam or have Vietnamese ancestry, and diaspora communities across the United States have been the strongest and most persistent voices for the rights of Vietnamese citizens. We echo the concerns of these constituents and share their desire for a future where the Vietnamese people can freely practice their religion, speak out against the government, and freely choose their leaders.

Vietnamese activists of all stripes, from human rights lawyers to bloggers to religious leaders, are held as prisoners of conscience. Nguyen Cong Chinh, a Lutheran pastor, has faced inhumane conditions and torture in prison, while his wife and family have suffered similar violence and intimidation at the hands of security forces. The 88-year old head of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Patriarch Thich Quang Do, has been under house arrest for nearly two decades following his release from prison. Renowned human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai has been jailed since December 2015, following his brutal public beating by attackers he identified as plainclothes police officers.

Last year, Vietnam suffered an enormous environmental catastrophe caused by illegal dumping of toxic materials from a plant owned by the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation. This disaster killed millions of fish and devastated local economies and livelihoods. The Vietnamese government's slow response, initial refusal to investigate the matter, and crackdown on public protests all harmed some of the poorest and most vulnerable Vietnamese.

These are just a few of the most egregious examples of the Vietnamese government's human rights abuses. We urge you to push Vietnam to respect the rights of its own citizens by allowing

for religious freedom, freedom of the press, and free speech and assembly. In fact, Vietnam is bound by its own laws as well as international agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), to provide the human rights protections it has denied its citizens.

To that end, the Vietnamese government must immediately release all prisoners of conscience and end the practice of punishing those who exercise their rights. Vietnam must take these steps if it wishes to seek greater economic and strategic ties with the United States.

Again, congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of State. We look forward to working with you to further human rights in Vietnam. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



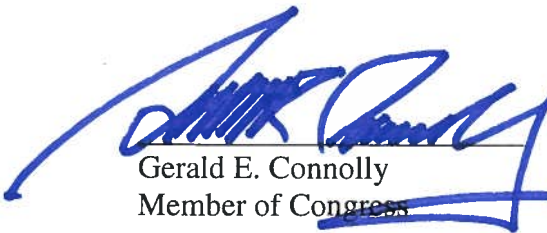
Alan Lowenthal  
Co-Chair, Congressional  
Caucus on Vietnam



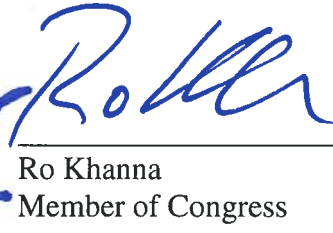
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