

STOP RELIGIOUS REPRESSION IN VIETNAM

October , 2001

Dear Colleague:

On October 19, 2001, the Vietnamese government sentenced Reverend Nguyen Van Ly to 15 years in prison on charges that he undermined the country's unity and violated a detention order. With the world's attention focused—rightly—on the fight against terror, the Vietnamese government convicted Father Ly in a two-hour trial without the presence of a defense lawyer or independent witnesses

This outrage is but the latest in a string of human rights violations visited upon the Vietnamese people by their own government. In May 2001, Father Ly submitted his testimony regarding religious freedom in Vietnam to a Congressional Human Rights Caucus hearing. The next day, Vietnamese authorities sent over 600 security police to An Truyen parish, where this peaceful Catholic priest was preparing to say Mass, and arrested him.

In June, security police surrounded several Buddhist temples and placed the Venerable Thich Quang Do under house arrest after he announced plans to escort the ailing patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam to Saigon for medical treatment. In September, a 61-year-old farmer and leader of the Buddhist Youth Movement in central Vietnam named Ho Tan Anh burned himself to death to protest the religious persecution of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

Later that month, the Vietnamese government used closed trials to impose harsh prison terms on fourteen members of the ethnic minority Montagnards from the Central Highlands of Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, the Montagnards were some of the United States' staunchest allies.

This fall, by a vote of 410-1, the House passed the Vietnam Human Rights Act. Among other things, this legislation recognized the plights of Father Ly, Venerable Thich Quang Do, and other religious leaders who have been repeatedly harassed and detained by the Vietnamese government. The Vietnam Human Rights Act called upon the Vietnamese government to honor its international commitments in the area of human rights, including its obligations as a signatory to the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We join the international community in condemning this most recent example of political repression in Vietnam, and urge our colleagues to sign the attached letter to Prime Minister Phan Van Khai calling for Father Ly's release. To sign the letter, please contact Jessica with Rep. Lofgren (5-3072) or Uyen with Rep. Davis (5-1492).

Sincerely,

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Tom Davis
Member of Congress

Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress