

April 06, 2006- Vietnam Denies Visa

Vietnamese Government Denies U.S. Rep. Sanchez Visa For Third Time

WASHINGTON- Today, the Government of Vietnam denied the visa application of Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez to enter Vietnam. This is the third attempt by the California Democrat to visit the Southeast-Asian nation. In addition to denying a personal request by Sanchez, the Government also denied an additional request by Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives J. Dennis Hastert.

Despite a personal invitation last year from Madame Ton Nu Thi Ninh, Vice-Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam, Sanchez was told that her request could not be accommodated because of the upcoming Vietnamese Party Congress taking place in Hanoi.

During the same week, Speaker Hastert will be visiting Vietnam along with seven other Members of Congress. In addition, the Vietnamese government yesterday approved a visa application to Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) to visit in the coming week.

"I'm particularly disappointed because Madame Ninh made a personal commitment to allow me to visit her in Vietnam-a promise she made during a visit where she was welcomed by the United States for nearly a month," said Sanchez. "The Vietnamese government tells us that they embrace democratic values, but one has to wonder why they are so concerned about allowing a U.S. Member of Congress to speak and travel freely in their nation, a courtesy we have repeatedly shown their diplomats."

Sanchez, a tireless advocate for human rights, has continuously challenged the Government of Vietnam to change its repressive human rights policy that is implicated in political and religious persecution. She has promoted awareness and policy debates in the U.S. Congress, urging her colleagues to address the human rights violations as it considers the United States' relationship with Vietnam. Sanchez is also the co-founder of Congressional Vietnam Caucus and represents one of the largest Vietnamese communities outside of Vietnam.

In the official letter denying her visa application, Ninh again extended an invitation for Sanchez to visit Vietnam. The Congresswoman intends to take her up on her offer.