

October 23, 2007: Sanchez Calls on Administration to Clarify Policy on Vietnam Refugees

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October 23, 2007

Reps. Lofgren and Sanchez Call on White House to Clarify Vietnam Refugee Policy

Letter Calls Attention to DHS's Treatment of Tran Family

Washington, D.C. - Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) joined with Representatives Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) and Christopher Smith (R-NJ) in co-signing a letter to President Bush asking him to clarify the administration's policy on the deportation of refugees to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The letter references recent comments by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel about the possible deportation of the Tran family to Vietnam. Mr. Tran, the patriarch of the family, fled Vietnam over two decades ago after escaping from a communist "re-education" camp.

"The administration must clarify the alarming statements made by the Department of Homeland Security," noted Rep. Zoe Lofgren. "I find it shocking that DHS would even consider deporting the Trans to Vietnam, where Mr. Tran had previously been imprisoned for anti-communist activities. The United States government should not be in the business of deporting people to totalitarian regimes."

"I was outraged to hear that the Bush Administration may be considering returning refugees to Vietnam. I am confident that if the Administration tries to implement this change that my House colleagues and I would take immediate action to block the deportation of refugees to Vietnam," said Rep. Loretta Sanchez.

Full text of the letter below:

October 23, 2007

President George W. Bush

The United States of America

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20502

Dear Mr. President:

I would like to draw your attention to a Los Angeles Times article printed on Friday, October 19, 2007 (please see attached). The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) arrested several members of the Tran family and, according to the article, U.S. officials are considering returning these refugees, who escaped "re-education" camps after the Vietnam War, to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

This came as a surprise to us and is a change in current U.S. policy. When Chairwoman Lofgren met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice last month for the annual refugee consultation, Secretary Rice did not suggest or even hint at any change in U.S. policy regarding the return of refugees to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

As a result, we are writing to confirm whether this troubling assertion is in fact a real and/or proposed change to U.S. policy. We are confident that Congress would express strong objections to any such change on the return of refugees to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

As you know, the U.S. Department of State has described the human rights situation in Vietnam as "unsatisfactory" in the 2006 Country Report on Human Rights Practices. The March 6, 2007 document states that, "Citizens could not change their government, and political opposition movements were officially prohibited and some activists arrested..." The Government of Vietnam maintains control over the press and the internet, continues to abuse "suspects during arrest, detention, and interrogation" and arbitrarily detains political activists. Vietnam suppresses freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, movement and association.

The State Department is not the only voice warning us about the state of human rights in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has reported that "Vietnam has initiated a severe crackdown on human rights defenders and advocates for the freedoms of speech, association and assembly, including many religious leaders."

USCIRF has recommended that Vietnam again be placed on the list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC).

In addition, Amnesty International reports that "Vietnamese lawyers, trade unionists, religious leaders and Internet dissidents have been detained or imprisoned in increasing numbers in recent months. Amnesty International is deeply concerned over an ongoing crackdown by the Vietnamese government against people who have done nothing but peacefully express their opinions."

In light of the above, we would find it most troubling if there has been a fundamental alteration to U.S. policy on the return of refugees to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, particularly if this has been done without notifying Congress. We respectfully request clarification on this matter as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Zoe Lofgren

Chair, Subcommittee on
Security, & International Law

Loretta Sanchez

Chair, Subcommittee on Border, Immigration, Refugees,
Counterterrorism

Border, Marit

Christopher Smith

Ranking Member, Subcommittee
on Africa & Global Health

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