

May 8, 2008: Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2007

The Honorable Loretta Sanchez

VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS ACT 2007

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Mr. Chairman, this is a very important step towards ensuring accountability for sexual assaults involving our service members.

I'm also very proud that per my request this bill requires the Department of Defense to conduct a study of its bandwidth needs for the near and long term. This study will help us ensure that the department has the capability to operate the advanced information technology systems that our military relies on.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill. It really is a great bill. And thank you to all of our Chair people and ranking members for having made it such a great bill.

- Madam Speaker, as you may know, I have the privilege of representing the Vietnamese community in Orange County--one of the largest outside of Vietnam.

- Human rights is an important issue to me and my Vietnamese constituents. Today, I want to highlight the importance of continuing to work for freedom and democracy in Vietnam, and to commend the advocates that are committed to this cause.

- This year marks the 14th anniversary of the House-Senate Joint Resolution designating May 11th as Vietnam Human Rights Day. As we prepare to observe Vietnam Human Rights Day, it is clear that the struggle is far from over.

- Human rights violations in Vietnam have only gotten worse since Vietnam was granted Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status, removed from the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern, added to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and allowed to be a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

- In my eyes, these policies, endorsed by the Bush Administration, have been rewards for a government that has made no real effort to improve its human rights record.

- The Government of Vietnam claimed that it had improved its human rights record, and that it would continue to make progress on the issue of human rights. However, their record speaks for itself.

- The Government of Vietnam has harassed, arrested and sentenced democracy advocates many of whom were not afforded a trial. That list includes: Father Nguyen Van Ly, Nguyen Phong, Nguyen Binh Thanh, Nguyen Bac Truyen, and Nguyen Van Dai, lawyer--just to name a few. But the list doesn't stop there.

- Since 2006 the Government of Vietnam has detained six American citizens--all falsely accused and harassed. One of those cases includes Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan who has been incarcerated in Vietnam since November for promoting peace and non-violence.

- Since his detainment in Vietnam, I have called for his immediate release and authored letters to both Secretary Rice and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung urging his safe return to the United States. I have met with his wife Mai Huong and have seen the anguish this injustice has caused their family--a family that has not been able to communicate with their loved one since last year.

- Dr. Nguyen Quan now awaits a trial scheduled for May 13 along with fellow democracy activists: Mr. Nguyen The Vu and Mr. Somsak Khunmi. I call on the Government of Vietnam to afford Dr. Quan and the other democracy advocates a fair and just trial. It is my greatest hope that his trial will be handled in a fair manner, unlike that of Father Ly, who was gagged, unable to speak at his own defense, and sentenced to 8 years in prison.

- So today I join the Vietnamese community in commemorating Vietnam Human Rights Day and urging support for the continuing advocacy efforts that are fighting for the most basic freedoms that we in the U.S. enjoy--freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion. These freedoms do not exist in Vietnam.

- I will continue working with my colleagues in the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus to advance human rights for the people of Vietnam. And as a cosponsor of H.R. 3096, the Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2007, I will continue to advocate for its passage with my colleagues in the Senate. I am pleased that Senator Barbara Boxer held a hearing on this legislation last March.

- It is my hope that H.R. 3096 will be brought to the Senate floor for a vote. This would be a clear message that Congress wants to see the Government of Vietnam get serious about improving human rights conditions