

March 04, 2004- Sanchez Statement on Vietnamese Dissident Father Ly

March 4, 2004 Sanchez Statement on Vietnamese Dissident Father Ly
Washington, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Sanchez joined other Members of Congress at a press conference to draw attention to the continuing human rights violation in Vietnam and made the following statement:

"Hello, and thank you for inviting me to take part in this important effort today.

"As some of you may know, I essentially became a spokeswoman of sorts for the Vietnamese community upon my election to Congress. I currently represent one of the largest Vietnamese communities outside of Vietnam in the world—a group I am not only proud to represent, but whom I’ve had the tremendous fortune to learn a great many things from.

"Many of my constituents not only immigrated from a country that refuses to afford it people even the most basic of human rights—including freedom of expression, access to information, and freedom of religion—but many have loved ones back in Vietnam who are seeking a voice.

"In light of this, I co-founded the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam with my colleagues Rep. Chris Smith, Rep. Zoe Lofgren, and Rep. Tom Davis.

"Our caucus is dedicated to promoting awareness and policy debates among the U.S. Congress, the American public, and the international community about the greater need for fundamental human rights in Vietnam.

"We are working to carry this out by holding hearings, maintaining a dialogue with those who work on U.S.-Vietnam relations at federal agencies and NGO’s, and advocating on behalf of dissidents and human rights advocates who are undergoing persecution at the hands of the Vietnamese government.

"Despite our efforts, we believe that Vietnam has made little progress. In fact, we’ve received countless reports which indicate that Vietnam is moving backwards.

"Journalists, poets, and human rights advocates continue to be harassed, placed under house arrest, and jailed for their peaceful advocacy of a free and democratic Vietnam.

"Religious dissidents continue to be imprisoned and crackdowns have been intensified on religious minorities in the northwestern provinces and central highlands.

"In the last year alone—and this is only to name a few—the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam has advocated on behalf of Dr. Pham Hong Son, Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, and the leadership of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, including the Venerables Thich Quang Do, Thich Huyen Quang, and Thich Tu Sy.

"As some of you may know, we introduced a resolution in the Congress this year calling on the Government of Vietnam to halt its persecution of the UBCV which passed by a vote of 412-9. This was a great success, and we know it received the attention of the Vietnamese Government.

"It is our hope that the resolution we are introducing today will receive the same attention.

"Father Ly’s case is particularly disturbing given the fact that he has continuously been harassed, detained, and imprisoned by the Government of Vietnam for over 25 years for his peaceful advocacy of religious freedom.

"His current imprisonment is even more egregious now that the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has ruled that Father Ly is being held in violation of international law.

"Vietnam must be held accountable! If the United States and Vietnam are to continue to enhance their bilateral relationship, Vietnam must stop persecuting its people for practicing their faith, for voicing their opinions, and for advocating the free flow of ideas and information.

"In closing, I’d like to thank you all for coming here to support this very important effort I’d like to extend a special thanks to Jared Ginser and Freedom Now for working to have Father Ly’s illegal detention recognized by the U.N. And I’d especially like to thank my colleagues Rep. Chris Smith and Senator Brownback for their hard work in drafting this resolution.

"I hope you all can work with us to get this legislation passed!"