



Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

12 November 2009

Viet Tan

MR COE (Ginninderra): Mr Speaker, recently I was very pleased to attend a 'Democracy Dinner' to discuss the on-going campaign for democracy in Vietnam. My Liberal colleague, Steve Doszpot also attended the event.

The dinner was hosted by the Viet Tan (Vietnam Reform Party) international Chairman, Mr Diem Do, and attended by other representatives of Viet Tan in Australia.

Viet Tan is a pro-democracy party with members both inside Vietnam and around the world. The party aims to establish democracy and bring about political change through peaceful means. Viet Tan believes that a free society is the best means to harness the vast potential of the country and its people. Also, a democratic Vietnam will contribute greatly to the prosperity and stability within the Asia-Pacific region.

Viet Tan operates in a very professional manner and is using the latest in new media and other campaign technology to get their message out. New media has opened up new opportunities for the campaigning work of Viet Tan as it has enabled them to spread their message to many in Vietnam and around the world that they previously have not been able to reach. However, the Vietnamese Government has severely restricted the ability of some in Vietnam to post their views on the web.

The night was a reminder to me of how lucky we are in Australia, through all the hard work of previous generations and generations to come, that we do enjoy the great freedoms, in particular freedom of speech, that those in Vietnam and other countries do not enjoy, and in fact, are persecuted for.

Viet Tan's grass-roots movement is important, because for freedom in Vietnam to be sustainable, the movement must come from within. It must be a movement from the bottom-up, and this is what Viet Tan aims to do.

In order to transform Vietnam from a dictatorship to a democratic society, a pluralistic society must first be established with all existing constraints against human rights completely removed. To accomplish this, Viet Tan has developed an action plan that details their ideas. The plan is as follows:

Program 1: Improving Social Welfare & Restoring Civil Rights

Program 2: Promoting Pluralism

Program 3: Building Collective Strength

Program 4: Expanding the Knowledge Base

Program 5: Investing in the Future Generation

Program 6: Lobbying International Support

Program 7: Strengthening the Overseas Vietnamese Community

Program 8: Building the Foundation to Reform Vietnam

Program 9: Protecting National Interests and Territorial Integrity

Program 10: Restoring Truth to Recent History

Further information about this path to democracy is available at www.viettan.org.

A Canberra journalist, Graham Cooke, recently published a fascinating article about the Viet Tan democracy movement and the struggle for peace that so many people have endured and are committed to. In the article, Cook writes:

Diem [Do] says members inside Vietnam are routinely persecuted. "Article Four of the Vietnamese Constitution states that there should be only one lawful political party and that is the Communist Party, so our members keep their identities a secret. If they are discovered they usually find themselves under 24-hour surveillance, they are harassed and even jailed," he said.

Viet Tan aims for a peaceful transition to democracy. "We would not have anything to do with a violent uprising. There has been enough violence in the past," he said.

Cooke goes on to say:

He [Diem] sees change coming through four kinds of pressure. “The first is popular pressure and that can express itself in many ways in calls for social changes, protests against corruption or calls for land rights. The second type of activity is the creation of a united opposition front where political parties band together in a call for a multi-party system and eventually free elections.

“Then there is international pressure - we travel the world, seeking support; that is why I am in Canberra at the moment. Finally we look to eventually see pressure coming from within the party leadership itself. Only when we can have all four working in coordination will we have enough power to crack the system.”

As I mentioned earlier, the dinner was hosted by international Chairman, Mr Diem Do. He was born in Saigon in 1963 and was a champion of freedom whilst at college, joining Viet Tan in 1982. He has an accomplished career in the industries of banking, manufacturing, and health care. Mr Diem Do was awarded an MBA from the University of Houston. In his role he has conversations with political leaders around the world, including a US Congressional Committee, and more recently at the Australian Parliament.

I would also like to recognise fantastic contribution of Lieu Do and Dr Phong Nguyen to the Viet Tan movement. These leaders are very successful in their professions and are therefore making a great personal sacrifice to donate so much time to Viet Tan.

On the night I was very privileged, along with Mr George Lemon, to be awarded honorary membership of Viet Tan. Viet Tan has no better friend in Canberra than George Lemon – a person who is a tireless campaigner for freedom in Vietnam and many other worthy causes.

I look forward to continuing to support Viet Tan in their promotion of democracy and freedom in Vietnam.