

## **HUMAN RIGHTS SPEECH**

### **NOTICE OF MOTION**

**28 May 2012**

#### **WORDS: 1,700**

As the Member for Fowler I have often raised concerns in regards to the human rights situation in Vietnam. My stance on this issue has been clear.

I believe in a world where people's fundamental rights are respected and I have always shown great admiration to those who are brave enough to stand up for their rights.

Over the past eighteen months since becoming the Member for Fowler, I have often been approached by the Vietnamese Community and asked to voice their concerns to Australian Parliament.

The major concern affecting almost one quarter of my electorate is human rights in Vietnam and I have seen it as both as honour and privilege to represent them in this Parliament on such an important issue.

Today I am joined by representatives from the VCA Management Committee, Vietnamese media and a number of Australian Vietnamese concerned about human rights. I thank them for attending tonight.

I moved this Notice of Motion because I am concerned at the increasing reports of gross human rights violations in Vietnam. Although the Vietnamese government signed the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights in 1982 there appears to have been little progress in the human rights situation in Vietnam.

From many I have been advised that the human rights situation has actually worsened.

Last Thursday 24 May Human Rights Watch indicated that four Catholic activists who were caught distributing pro democracy leaflets were tried in the Court of Nghe An under Article 88.

In 2011 Vietnamese courts used this provision to convict at least 10 bloggers and activists for expressing their views including the legal advocate Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu, bloggers Vi

Duc Hoi, Lu Van Bay, Ho Thi Bich Khuong, Nguyen Ba Dang.

In March 2012 the People's Court of Nghe An convicted two other Catholic activists, Vo Thi Thu Thuy and Nguyen Van Thanh, under article 88. At least another 12 Catholic bloggers and activists, including the prominent bloggers Ta Phong Tan and Le Van Son, are in detention pending investigation or waiting trial.

In April Dr Nguyen Quoc Quan a resident of California was also detained upon arriving at Tan Son Nhat International Airport in Saigon and charged under Article 84 "terrorism". Dr Nguyen is a long time democracy activist and a member of Viet Tan.

Rightly we call Vietnam our South-East Asian neighbour and indeed a most valued trading partner but I for one am appalled at the number of people currently incarcerated in Vietnam for exercising their fundamental human rights.

I refer to people whose only crime is to support political groups not recognised by the state, those who criticise government policy or to call for democracy.

It is very concerning that since 2002, Australia has had nine rounds of dialogue with Vietnam on human rights with no apparent results. As a trading partner and a significant aid donor, I believe Australia has both a moral and legal right to require Vietnam to abide by its international legal obligations.

We do not need to chronicle the human rights abuses; what we need is to see genuine progress. We need to see positive outcomes through our relationship with Vietnam.

At the very minimum Australia, along with the international community, should require that the undertakings freely given by the Vietnamese government in signing the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, be honoured.

In moving this Notice of Motion I call on the Australian government to review the current Human Rights Dialogue with Vietnam with a view to involving Members of Parliament and Senators.

I am in the fortunate position in being made aware of human rights abuses from the management committee of Vietnamese Community of Australia, Colonel Vo Dai Ton, Father Paul and Father Francis, Vietnam Sydney Radio, as well as Viet Tan.

These people and organisations have shown much passion and commitment in improving the human rights situation in Vietnam and I would welcome their constructive input in such a dialogue.

I firmly believe the government should consider the issues of human rights in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam when allocating funding under Australia's overseas development aid program.

And I believe the government should encourage a 'whole of government' approach on bilateral and multilateral bases with Vietnam, particularly where the issue of human rights is concerned.

I have always had great respect and admiration for human rights defenders. As the Member for Fowler I have been fortunate to have formed friendships with some of these heroic men and women.

Two whom I would like to particularly mention Colonel Vo Dai Ton and Dr Tien Nguyen. These men have not only contributed immensely in the field of human rights but also to the wider Australian community.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Father Ly who has spent a total of 15 years in prison since 1977 for his campaign for religious freedom, democracy and human rights.

According to Human Rights Watch, Father Ly was sent back to prison at the end of July in 2011 and sentenced to a further five years prison followed by five years of probation. There are great concerns for Father Ly's health as he has suffered three strokes whilst in solitary confinement in prison in 2009 and also has a brain tumour. I have had the opportunity to speak to

Father Ly in the past through the assistance of Vietnam Sydney Radio and greatly admire his dedication to human rights.

In March earlier this year I paid tribute to the families of human rights defenders: the husbands, the wives, the mothers, the fathers and the children of these brave men and women who remain incredibly affected not only by the denial of human rights but have been let down by a legal system which fails to honour fairness and equity for those who speak out.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge human rights defenders, it is equally important to acknowledge their families, and the hardships they endure in supporting their loved ones.

Vietnamese people are some of the most courageous, capable and generous people I have ever met. Three decades ago they showed immense courage in leaving their home and searching for a better life.

Those that have settled in Australia have shown great capacity in what they have been able to achieve. Vietnamese people have also shown great generosity, contributing widely to the

Australian community, not just in sharing with us their food and cultural festivities but also in being proactive when it comes to helping fellow Australians in need.

For example of the fundraising efforts which followed the devastation of the Queensland floods demonstrates the extent of the generosity of the Vietnamese community.

A good friend of mine, Dr Vinh Binh Lieu, told me of an old Vietnamese saying which loosely translates, 'When you eat the fruit of the tree, have regard to those who planted the seed.' He told me that over the past 37 years Australia has provided protection and support for so many Vietnamese families when they were vulnerable and in need.

Now, seeing fellows Australians in difficulty, they saw it as their responsibility as a community to give back. Together the Vietnamese community of South West Sydney raised more than \$450,000 for the Queensland Flood Appeal.

Clearly, the generosity and compassion of the Vietnamese community is extraordinary.



I believe the big challenge for the Vietnamese government is to look at its people as their most valuable resource. To date it would appear the Vietnamese government has not had either the faith and courage to do so. This brings me back to my Notice of Motion.

By overseeing a Vietnamese Human Rights Dialogue involving Members of Parliament, Senators and the wider community, human rights abuses in Vietnam can be more regularly and appropriately discussed.

I believe there should be more opportunities for community groups such as the VCA to raise human rights concerns directly with the Australian government.

Further, by addressing human rights issues when allocating funding under Australia's overseas development aid program, we are emphasising the importance of human rights to the Australian government which is also why we should be pressing the Vietnamese regime to honour the International Agreements which they have freely entered into.

As a democratic country we have the freedom to express our views, criticise our governments and practice our religions. Despite whatever differences we may have, the recognition of an individual's rights is what unites us.

Australia has taken a leading role within our region in pursuing human rights and we should be proud of that. We have taken a leading role in developing trade in neighbouring countries such as Vietnam. Again, that is something we should be proud of. In doing so, we need to go further.

More than simply mouthing the words we should be requiring those countries that sign the International Convention for Civil and Political Rights, not only honour the spirit of the convention for trade purposes but also honour each and everyone of its articles particularly those that apply to people and their freedoms.

I speak out not to be destructive as I recognise that war has devastated Vietnam enough in that respect. However I speak

out of compassion. As I have regularly said Vietnam has a great potential to achieve much in a modern world.

However to achieve this as well as achieving proper international recognition the first step is to show a genuine respect for the fundamental human rights of its own people.

I thank the Vietnamese Community in Australia, the community leaders, Federal President Phong Nguyen, NSW President Thanh Nguyen, ACT President Cong Le together with the rest of their committee.

I thank Catholic Fathers: Father Francis and Father Paul Van Chi, Viet Tan, Vietnam Sydney Radio, Colonel Vo Dai Ton and the many constituents who have raised the issue of human rights to my attention.

The love which Vietnamese Australians have for their traditional homeland and their desire for a brighter future for Vietnam is truly inspiring. I Look forward to a future for Vietnam where fundamental human rights are honoured and respected