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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Vietnam**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 27 May 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Simpkins, Luke, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr SIMPKINS** (Cowan) (7.40 pm)—On previous occasions I have spoken on behalf of Vietnamese people within the electorate of Cowan and have voiced their concerns that their homeland is being held back by the restrictions imposed by the government of Vietnam. By ‘held back’ I mean that the conditions under which people of Vietnamese origin prosper in Cowan are not shared by those in Vietnam. Vietnamese nationals have no access to the freedoms we hold dear—such as democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of association. I would now like to make mention of one particular restriction that applies in Vietnam: restrictions on the internet.

I am aware that the Vietnamese government has for years been controlling the internet by blocking websites critical of the regime. I also understand that, according to Reporters Sans Frontieres, Vietnam is among the worst countries when it comes to internet freedom. To make the point, in October 2008 the Vietnamese government created a new entity: the Administration Agency for Radio, Television and Electronics Information. That agency’s responsibility is to monitor the internet and control the flow of information from bloggers as the number of internet users continues to rise rapidly.

The new agency falls under the Ministry of Information and Communications which, under a directive known as ‘Circular 07’, in December 2008 updated the government’s powers to censor the internet. According to a senior ministry official:

The state encourages the use of blogs to serve personal freedom but bloggers have to respect social interests and community interests under the laws.

It is very clear that this reference to social and community interests demonstrates an implied threat. The implied threat has been realised. In practice, this official statement means that internet users who post items on the internet deemed to oppose the state face severe penalties. The restrictions include political commentary which criticises the decisions of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the posting of links to sites which are blocked in the country. The new internet decree is ultimately an extension of article 88 which criminalises free speech. Under that article, so-

called propaganda against the state can be punished by fines and up to 12 years of jail time.

In January 2008, Nguyen Van Hai, a 56-year-old human rights activist who blogs under the name ‘Dieu Cay’, called for a boycott of the Olympic torch relay and advocated for freedom of expression. The planned demonstration was in reaction to Chinese occupation of the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea—which Vietnam also claims. Security police arrested Dieu Cay on charges of tax evasion in a case widely seen by both domestic bloggers and the international community as punishment for his political expression. Dieu Cay was sentenced to 2½ years imprisonment.

Pham Thanh Nghien, a 32-year-old human right activist, was among a dozen activists arrested in September 2008 after publishing commentary that was critical of government policies on the internet. Just prior to her arrest, Pham Thanh Nghien held a sit-in inside her home to protest police harassment. She was arrested and ever since has been held without trial. Her family has yet to be allowed to visit her.

A 30-year-old mobile-phone repairman, Truong Quoc Huy, was previously arrested at his home in Saigon in October 2005 with his two brothers and a female friend. The group had been taking part in a Paltalk chat room discussion about democracy. They were detained incommunicado for nine months. One month after his release in October 2006, Truong Quoc Huy was arrested again when a dozen police stormed a Saigon internet cafe. He was chatting online. He was subsequently sentenced to six years imprisonment followed by three years of house arrest.

These are examples of the restrictions on rights and the oppression of individuals in Vietnam. I would like to thank the Viet Tan—the Vietnam reform party—and my friends in the Vietnamese community for keeping me up to date with these issues in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government should immediately release internet activists Mr Nguyen Van Hai, Ms Pham Thanh Nghien and Mr Truong Quoc Huy. The Vietnamese government should start respecting internet freedom and, above all, freedom of expression.

The Vietnamese people of Cowan are a hardworking part of our community. They came to Australia with very little. They came to seek freedom and to prosper in our society. They have done that, and done it well.

When I look around my electorate and see what they have achieved, I wonder what the people who remain in Vietnam could achieve if they were not held back by the restrictive and controlling Communist Party of Vietnam. I again thank my Vietnamese friends in Cowan and across Australia, and I say to those that continue to fight for freedom in Vietnam to keep up the fight, not with weapons, but with technology, courage and faith. I look forward to the day Vietnam will be free again. Carm Urn.