

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 10, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

In advance of your anticipated travel to Vietnam this month, we are writing to strongly urge you to take advantage of this opportunity to encourage the Vietnamese government to improve its record on human rights. We believe that a closer relationship needs to be conditioned upon improvements with regard to human rights. The status quo in Vietnam is unacceptable, and we have serious concerns about strengthening ties with this government. We have particular concerns about our increasing trade partnership with Vietnam, including the ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations. Any further economic ties, specifically trade agreements, should be contingent on the condition of human rights in Vietnam. The government of Vietnam has perpetually ignored its promises to improve its human rights record and continues to blatantly act in disregard to international law.

The Vietnamese government's track record on human rights has steadily deteriorated since 2007, when Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization. In its most recent report, issued in April 2013, the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) found:

Vietnam's overall human rights record remains very poor. In the wake of battles within the Communist Party's leadership during the past several years, the government has moved decisively to repress any perceived challenges to its authority, tightening controls on freedom of expression, association, and assembly. In the past year, new decrees were issued prohibiting peaceful protest, limiting speech on the Internet, and tightening controls on journalists and access to the internet at cafes. At least 34 dissidents and human rights defenders were imprisoned, some to long sentences.

Similarly, Human Rights Watch, in its World Report 2013, concluded:

The Vietnam government systematically suppresses freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and persecutes those who question government policies, expose official corruption, or call for democratic alternatives to one-party rule. Police harass and intimidate activists and their family members. Authorities arbitrarily arrest activists, hold them incommunicado for long periods without access to legal counsel or family visits, subject them to torture, and

prosecute them in politically pliant courts that mete out long prison sentences for violating vaguely worded national security laws.

The condition of human rights in Vietnam continues to worsen. The Wall Street Journal noted in June of this year that nearly as many bloggers and democracy activists had been arrested in Vietnam as in all of 2012. Moreover, though it already possesses extensive powers to restrict internet freedom, on September 1, the government put into effect yet another internet content law – Decree 72 – which, according to the Library of Congress’s Global Legal Monitor, “prohibits use of Internet services and online information to oppose the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; threaten the national security, social order, and safety; sabotage the "national fraternity"; arouse animosity among races and religions; or contradict national traditions, among other acts.” This vague and overbroad law also restricts the sharing of news through blogs and social media sites. We are deeply concerned by the government’s desperate attempts to silence its own citizens and to establish control over the sharing of information.

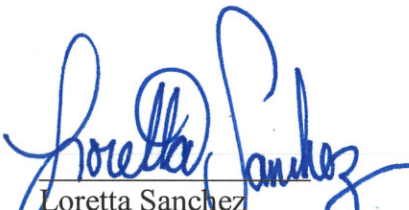
More broadly, the government continues to crack down on religious freedom, harassing and persecuting members of a broad range of faiths for religious activity and activism. In addition, human rights organizations, political parties, and labor organizations that are seen to threaten the government have been banned. These actions demonstrate a lack of respect for basic human rights as well as for international law.

We strongly urge you to put human rights first during your visit to Vietnam. Despite the Vietnamese government’s effort to portray itself as a model trading partner, this is an authoritarian regime that uses draconian laws and one-party rule to repress its citizens. Vietnam’s record on human rights is counter to American values, and we hope that you will demand an end to these injustices during your discussions with the Vietnamese government.

Sincerely,




Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress




Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress



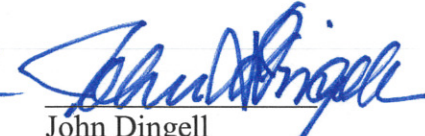
Chris Smith
Member of Congress



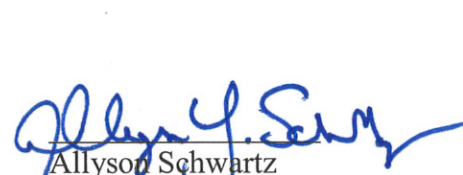
Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

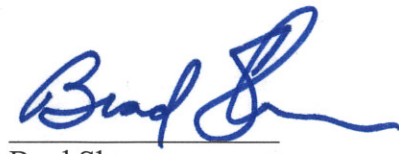


Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



John Dingell
Member of Congress

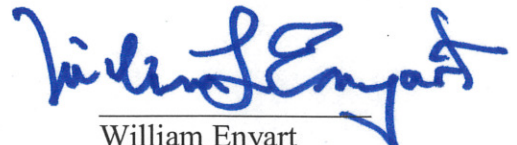

Allyson Schwartz
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Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



Dan Lipinski
Member of Congress

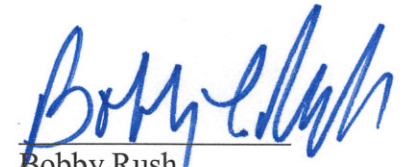

Chellie Pingree
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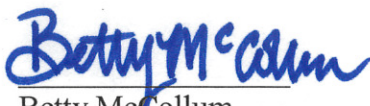

Susan Davis
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Gene Green
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Linda Sanchez
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Bobby Rush
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Betty McCollum
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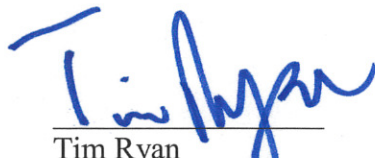

Lloyd Doggett
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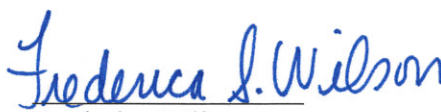

Alan Grayson
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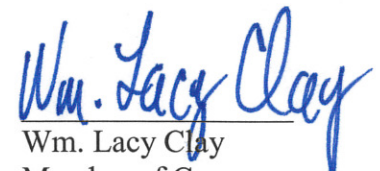

Elijah Cummings
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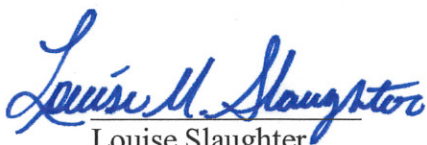

Sam Farr
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Jan Schakowsky
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Tim Ryan
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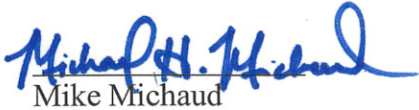

Frederica Wilson
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Wm. Lacy Clay
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Louise Slaughter
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Brian Higgins
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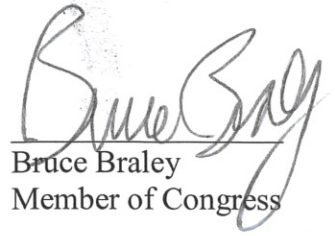

Tim Bishop
Member of Congress



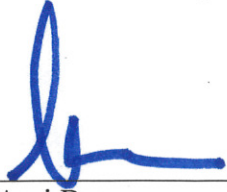
Mike Michaud
Member of Congress



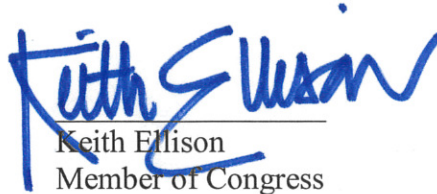
Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



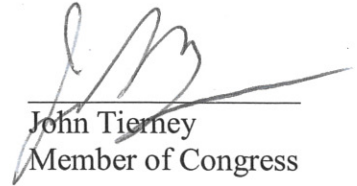
Bruce Braley
Member of Congress



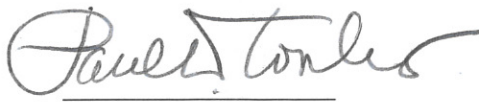
Ami Bera
Member of Congress



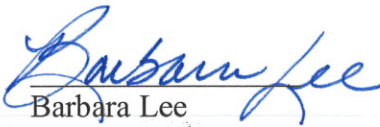
Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



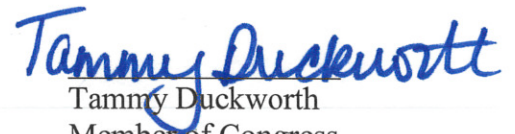
John Tierney
Member of Congress



Paul Tonko
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Tammy Duckworth
Member of Congress

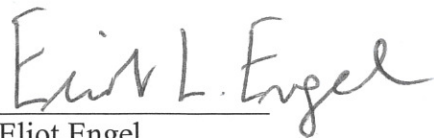


Marcy Kaptur
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Mike Honda
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Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress



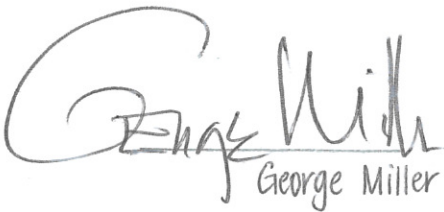
Eliot Engel
Member of Congress



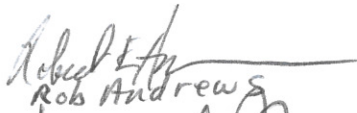
Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



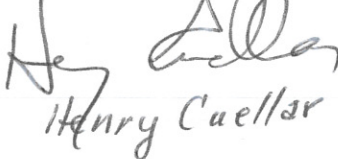
Jim McGovern
Member of Congress



George Miller



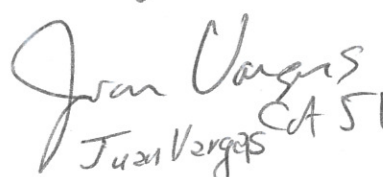
Rob Andrews



Henry Cuellar



John Garamendi



Juan Vargas
CA 51