



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Baha'i Faith

SPEECH

Thursday, 10 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Simpkins, Luke, MP

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Responder
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Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (09:48): Last Sunday I celebrated the birthday of Buddha, also known as Vesak Day with the Vietnamese community in the electorate of Cowan. The celebration of Vesak includes the birth, enlightenment and passing of Gautama Buddha. It is the right time to reflect on the fact that to this day in Vietnam people do not have the freedom to speak, the freedom to worship, the freedom to travel without being under strict police surveillance.

In recent years, countless Vietnamese democracy activists and human rights offenders have been subjected to ill-treatment and arbitrary detention by the Hanoi regime. Many Vietnamese people from inside and outside the country have endeavoured to help shoulder the hardship and further democrat change in Vietnam through peaceful grassroots action. An example is Dr Nguyen Quoc Quan, who, in April 2012, was detained upon arrival at Saigon airport. According to stories published by the state controlled media, Dr Quan has been charged with terrorism under the Vietnamese penal code.

The Vietnamese government's accusations of terrorism against Dr Quan are completely fabricated and have no basis. Dr Quan is a former high school teacher in Vietnam, a long-term democracy activist and a member of Viet Tan, the democracy party. His detention is the latest example of the Vietnamese Communist Party's ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders and anyone who speaks against them. I challenge the Hanoi regime to prove its accusations in the court of Vietnamese and international public opinion. Dr Quan and all other voices of conscience must be released immediately and unconditionally in Vietnam.

In my Vesak speech I highlighted that in Australia we are very lucky and fortunate that we can exercise our rights freely and that we have a legal system that protects us from the wrongdoer—unlike in Vietnam, where the abuse of laws is orchestrated by local officials and government officials throughout the country. A current example of the legal system being controlled by the government is in the Van Giang district, where land has been unconstitutionally confiscated from farmers—land that they have worked so hard on for many years and lands that families depend upon to put food on the table. Farmers in this district are facing the use of military force, weapons and grenades to force them out of their rightfully owned land by local officials—by what the regime calls the 'people's police'. Many farmers have lost everything, including a roof over their head, and yet the government turned away and let these harassing persecutions continue.

I believe that this parliament should aim, as I do, for a democratic Vietnam where the Vietnamese people determine their own future, a Vietnam where everyone is free to practise their religion without fear, and a Vietnam where Vietnamese people can speak freely and where the government is accountable to the people and not where the people are accountable to the government.