



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Main Committee

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Human Rights: Vietnam

SPEECH

Wednesday, 3 February 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker Simpkins, Luke, MP	Question No.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (9.30 am)—On 29 January 2010, Vietnamese freelance journalist Pham Thanh Nghien was jailed for three years following a trial in Haiphong, convicted of spreading anti-state propaganda. I take this opportunity to express my disappointment in the direction that the Communist Party is taking in Vietnam. Increasing incidence of suppression of free speech, democracy and religious freedoms is becoming more concerning for the Vietnamese-Australian community in this country.

The government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam describes these people as dissidents. I think that it would be more accurate to describe these people as patriots. So much of the activity that they protest about concerns their defence of their national interest—in particular the deal to surrender Vietnamese claims for islands within the Spratly and Paracel groups and the environmentally damaging deals with China for bauxite mines in the highlands of Vietnam. To question these deals and to inquire about what benefits were achieved and who benefited personally is interpreted as spreading anti-state propaganda. Clearly, Vietnam has a long way to go regarding freedoms and, as is usual within these alleged communist/socialist systems, small elites seem to live very well while those who work hardest never benefit from their efforts. I have said it in the past and I will say it again: in Australia people of Vietnamese heritage thrive and their hard work is rewarded. Their families and friends who remain in Vietnam also work hard but live a much more difficult life under the yoke of a government which is also known as the Communist Party. While the people struggle, the party officials benefit under special deals. The failure of the people to benefit whilst living under communism and socialism is repeated in Vietnam as it has been repeated since 1917 in every case where such flawed systems of government have been established.

On Friday, 5 February the trial of Tran Khai Thanh Thuy will take place. She is a novelist, a journalist, a member of Bloc 8406 and, above all, a human rights activist who is on trial for assault. The case depends on a photograph that has been altered. It is alleged by the prosecutors that on 8 October she and her husband assaulted a neighbour. I am informed that while they were defending themselves against plain-clothes police Tran Khai Thanh Thuy was hit on the head with a brick. The prosecution's case in the assault depends on photographs that were taken in 2005. They have been altered and a date of 9 October placed on them. Sadly, this is the way that Vietnamese dissidents—or Vietnamese patriots, as I call them—are dealt with. The government and the authorities in Vietnam are very good at suppressing freedom of speech. They are very good at not allowing democracy and they repress religious freedom as well. These things are holding that country back. It is a land of great opportunity, and things should change. (*Time expired*)