



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Dang, Mr Dieu Xuan

SPEECH

Tuesday, 28 October 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Simpkins, Luke, MP

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Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (21:05): I take this opportunity tonight to speak about the arrest and imprisonment in Vietnam of Dang Xuan Dieu. Dieu was arrested on 30 July 2011 and charged with attempting to overthrow the government under article 79 of the Vietnamese penal code. On 9 January 2013, he received a sentence of 13 years imprisonment, to be followed by five years of house arrest. He is currently imprisoned at Camp 5, Yen Dinh, in Thanh Hoa province.

Dieu was arrested for being a member of the Viet Tan but also for leading protests by Vietnamese nationalists against Beijing's imperialist policy in the South China Sea. He was also known for fighting for an education for poor children and as a demonstrator against the exploitation and environmental damage caused by Chinese concession bauxite mines in the highlands of that country. Known as a Catholic intellectual, he also promoted awareness campaigns of the plight of political prisoners.

Dieu was arrested as part of a larger crackdown on human rights fighters, and is serving one of the longest sentences of any political prisoner in Vietnam. He decided that, because he continues to assert his innocence, he should not have to wear prison clothing that has the inscription 'criminal' on it. As a result of his resistance he has faced severe mistreatment in prison, including solitary confinement and a lack of food or access to basic hygiene.

This mistreatment included, in 2013, Dieu's humiliation when for several months other prisoners were encouraged to beat him and treat him as their slave. The beatings have also come from the prison guards, of course. They have also been responsible for giving Dieu reduced meal sizes and contaminated water. Other prisoners were asked to paint him as 'a half-human, half-beast figure'. As a result of this mistreatment he went on a hunger strike, calling for a more humane prison system.

Having heard nothing from Dieu, his family issued an open appeal in June 2014 because they were worried about his welfare—and they were right to be. Since April Dieu has been intermittently held in solitary confinement in a cell of just six to eight square meters. The prisoners were often chained in pairs, but in summer officials would squeeze more prisoners into

Dieu's cell to overcrowd it—in order to make it more difficult to breathe in the stifling conditions in that cell. In winter, the torment of Dieu was achieved by leaving him alone to feel the cold by himself.

On numerous occasions, Dieu went on hunger strike to protest these abuses of basic rights, not only for himself but for other inmates. Each time the prison authorities retaliated with more severe treatment. After being imprisoned, Dieu sent a letter to the police minister to complain about the mistreatment he was receiving. The result has been that just one family visit has been allowed. This meant that the abuse he is suffering only came to light after a friend and cell mate, Truong Minh Tam, was released on 7 October.

The plight of Dieu has attracted attention both inside Vietnam and internationally. We should remember that with six million followers Catholicism is Vietnam's second largest religion after Buddhism. The country's Catholic Church has been subject to government seizures of land and church properties. It would not therefore be a surprise that, at the request of family members, Catholics in Saigon have been encouraging others to pray for him and campaigning for his release.

Internationally, following his trial, a number of organisations protested the convictions as inconsistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights relating to freedom of expression and due process. Apart from the US embassy in Hanoi, the UN human rights office, a number of international human rights groups and various parliamentarians have also raised these issues. It is also notable that Stanford Law School's Allen Weiner submitted a petition contesting the illegal arrest and ongoing detention of Dang Xuan Dieu and his colleagues to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the UNWGAD, in Geneva in July 2012. In a decision announced on 28 November 2013, the working group ruled that Dang Xuan Dieu and the others were detained in violation of international law and called for their immediate release.

The reality now is that, despite the efforts inside Vietnam and the profile of his case internationally, Dang Xuan Dieu remains in prison where his mistreatment continues. Although my last two visa applications for Vietnam have been refused, I am

nevertheless honoured to raise his case in the Australian parliament today and highlight this travesty of justice—as I have highlighted other cases in the same way. I believe that, sadly, his life is at risk because of the reckless physical abuse of this brave human rights defender. I therefore call upon the Prime Minister of Vietnam to release Dang Xuan Dieu and to do so immediately.