



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Father Nguyen Van Ly**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 4 June 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) (4.50 pm)—I would like to take this opportunity to again speak on the issue of human rights in Vietnam. In particular, I will speak on the circumstances of Father Nguyen Van Ly, the Roman Catholic priest and famous pro-democracy dissident. Father Ly was born in 1947 and has spent more than 15 years in jail for his belief in freedom of speech and freedom of religion. I should also note that Father Ly is a man committed to peaceful and non-violent protest. Father Ly has been speaking about and taking action for democracy and religious freedom for many years. Since 1977 he has been harassed, arrested, brutalised and jailed for his activities. He was first jailed in 1977 for one year. In 1983 he was jailed for a further nine years for the charge of ‘opposing the revolution and destroying the people’s unity’. In 2001 Father Ly was again arrested for an alleged breach of probation. He was taken away from his church and some months later was eventually sentenced to 15 years. He was jailed for his activities promoting democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. After several reductions in his sentence, he eventually served 2½ years and, although released from jail, he was placed under house arrest in Hue.

On 8 April 2006, a group of dissidents signed the ‘Manifesto on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam’. The ‘Manifesto on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam’ calls for a multiparty state in Vietnam. That group became known as Bloc 8406, named for the date they signed the manifesto. It calls for democracy and Father Ly was a founding member of Bloc 8406. A week later, Father Ly and other catholic priests published an online, yet underground, publication known as Free Speech. Given the very strong controls by the Vietnamese government on the internet, this action can best be described as fearless. In September, Father Ly was also involved in the establishment of the Viet Nam Progression Party. For his courage and commitment to democracy, and for his support of Bloc 8406, Father Ly was jailed for eight years on 30 March 2007. He had been arrested on 19 February after a raid by security police in the Catholic Archdiocese of Hue. Father Ly was then isolated in custody at Ben Cui in central Vietnam. He undertook a hunger strike between 24 February and 5 March before he was sentenced.

At the trial, the now-famous photo was taken where a security guard attempted to silence Father Ly by holding a hand over his mouth. It has been reported

that Father Ly had attempted to shout out, ‘Down with communism!’ Father Ly is a courageous and honourable man who has made great sacrifices for his beliefs. He has spent many years in jail. He has spent many years being harassed and brutalised by an oppressive regime. However, Father Ly is not the only person who languishes in Vietnamese jails. There is oppression of the ethnic minority group, the Montagnard, who protested over land ownership and religious freedom issues in 2001 and 2004. Hundreds of montagnards remain in jail.

With regard to pro-democracy advocates, we are rapidly approaching the first anniversary of the arrest and jailing without charge of eight Vietnamese democracy activists. They were arrested for protesting against government policies toward China. Between 10 and 23 September 2008, Vietnamese security forces detained a number of those people: Nguyen Xuan Nghia, a writer and leader of Bloc 8406 and a past recipient of the Human Rights Watch Hellman-Hammett award, was arrested on 11 September; Pham Thanh Nghien Vu Hung, a schoolteacher, verbally accused of committing propaganda against the state, was arrested on 18 September; Ngo Quynh, a university student who was involved in the planned demonstrations against the Beijing Olympic Torch Relay; Tran Duc Thach, a well-known poet, was arrested on 10 September; Pham Van Troi, an engineer and member of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, was arrested on 10 September; Nguyen Van Tuc, a farmer, was arrested on 10 September; and Nguyen Van Tinh, previously jailed for organising against the regime, was arrested on 23 September.

It is my firm belief that democracy is the only legitimate form of government and best allows a nation and its people to progress and succeed economically. I look forward to the day when democracy prevails in Vietnam and when freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of association will be enshrined in that society. until that day, I call upon the government of Vietnam to release Father Ly and all pro-democracy prisoners. Justice and freedom will prevail.