



14<sup>th</sup> September 2009

The Hon Stephen Smith MP  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Parliament House  
PO Box 6022  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I am writing in relation to the plight of political prisoners in Vietnam.

My electorate has a considerable number of Vietnamese Australian constituents, who have made many valuable contributions to Australia and particularly in the Cowan electorate. They have prospered under the freedoms we have in Australia and because of their very positive work ethic.

I am in regular contact with my Vietnamese constituents regarding the current political situation in Vietnam, where the Vietnamese regime continues to oppress its citizens. The Communist Government has recently arrested several more dissidents, such as lawyer Le Cong Dinh, Youth activist Nguyen Tien Trung and several bloggers. In addition, they continue to keep the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do under pagoda arrest, imprison lawyer Le Thi Cong Nhan, and many other dissidents.

On many occasions in Federal Parliament I have raised the issues of the repression of democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of religious expression. I have also spoken of the imprisonment of pro-democracy activists in Vietnam. In June, I spoke of Catholic priest Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly whom I greatly admire for his courage to speak out in opposition of the regime's treatment of its citizens. For that reason, he is currently serving eight years imprisonment with an additional five years of house arrest.

I have been informed that Father Ly's health has deteriorated significantly due to the poor living conditions in prison. He suffers from hypertension and is poorly treated, with limited access to medical care. There was even concern that he may have had a mild stroke recently.

Today, I was informed that a number of pro-democracy activists will be tried on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009 for "propaganda against the socialist state" banned under Article 88 of the Vietnamese Penal Code. They are writer Nguyen Xuan Nghia a leader of the pro-democracy Bloc 8406, a university student Ngo Quynh, former communist party member Nguyen Manh Son, land right activist Nguyen Van Tuc, electrician Nguyen Kim Nhan and essayist Nguyen Van Tinh. These activists will be tried in Haiphong. In addition, engineer Pham Van Troi and high school teacher Vu Hung will also be tried in Hanoi, on the very same day. The alleged offences concern writing online commentaries critical of the Vietnamese government as well as criticising territorial concessions made to China in the form of hanging banners such as "Protect Vietnam's territorial sovereignty" and "Democracy, human rights, and multi-parties for Vietnam".

I can also inform you of my strong support for the Australian Vietnamese Community's proposals to have the Australian consulate officials visit prisoners of conscience and their relatives. If this is not possible, then I would ask that the Embassy in Hanoi ask for international media to be allowed to attend the trials. I would also ask that you raise this matter with the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Canberra.

It is my view that the Vietnamese Government should immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners. Until that happens I would ask that you take steps to suspend the "Human Rights Technical Cooperation" (HRTC) aid program to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam thereby pursuing the advancement of Human Rights in Vietnam.

Yours sincerely,



**LUKE SIMPKINS MP**  
Federal Member for Cowan