



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Vietnam: Human Rights

SPEECH

Thursday, 1 November 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker Ripoll, Bernie, MP	Question No.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (09:45): My electorate of Oxley is distinguished by a range of fantastic communities. In particular, it has a large and very important Vietnamese community which spans the western suburbs of Brisbane. Like many people in Australia, they are passionate about human rights and concerned about the wellbeing of others. In particular, as you would expect, the Vietnamese community are concerned about human rights back in their country, so I regularly take the opportunity to lend my support and my voice to that cause. I have spoken on these matters a number of times and written to either the embassy here in Canberra or the Prime Minister of Vietnam highlighting the cases of dissidents, democracy activists, freedom-of-speech activists and even musicians and artists who have been jailed for pursuing their right to have a voice.

Again, unfortunately, I need to come into this House and raise these issues to bring them to the attention of the Australian community, the parliament and the Vietnamese government. Two activists and musicians, Vo Minh Tri, better known as Viet Khang, and Tran Vu Anh Binh, were convicted and received jail sentences for composing songs critical of the Vietnamese regime. The songs the men penned were critical of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and the response of the Vietnamese government to the Chinese claims. Both men were arrested and detained in late 2011. Vo Minh Tri was sentenced to four years jail and two years under surveillance. Tran Vu Anh Binh received six years jail and two years under surveillance. This decision has been described by an Amnesty International representative as part of a 'very disturbing trend of repression against those who peacefully voice opinions the Vietnamese authorities do not like'. Vo Minh Tri had uploaded his songs to YouTube and they went viral, showing that the regime is struggling to control the new medium of social media. It meant they had raised too much concern.

It seems almost incredible to us here in Australia that anyone could be arrested and jailed for doing something as simple as writing a song or voicing their view—a right that we treasure in this democracy and this parliament. Whether it is in Vietnam, in China or in any other part of the world, people ought to have that most basic of human rights—to be able to express their own view in a peaceful, non-violent manner. The reality for the people who live in Vietnam is that these things are a daily occurrence. I very much understand and sympathise with the views of the Vietnamese community in my electorate when they want people here to speak up on their behalf and on behalf of their families back home. *(Time expired)*