



**EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Hanoi**

November 4, 2005

AMBASSADOR

Mr. Nguyen M. Le
Chairman
Vietnam Human Rights Network
12522 Brookhurst St., Suite 23
Garden Grove, CA 92840

Dear Mr. Nguyen:

Thank you for the letter that you gave me during my recent trip to the United States. The United States Government wholly shares your concerns about the human rights situation in Vietnam, concerns that I heard echoed by many others in the Vietnamese-American community during my meetings in Southern California. We are particularly concerned by reports of Vietnamese Government actions against religious leaders and the often severe restraints on the free expression of ideas to which you refer. We will therefore continue to make every effort to persuade the Government of Vietnam to further relax restrictions on the activities of certain Vietnamese religious believers and to allow greater freedom of speech. I would like to outline some of the positive steps we are taking to encourage these changes for the better in Vietnam.

As you know, on September 15, 2004, the Secretary of State designated Vietnam a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for violations of religious freedom. This reflected our deep concern about serious and ongoing restrictions on religious practice in Vietnam. I believe that this designation has led to productive changes. Since the new Ordinance on Religion came into effect one year ago, Vietnam has developed implementing regulations for this Ordinance, several well-known religious and other prisoners have been

released from prison and the Prime Minister has issued special instructions regarding Protestants that for the first time allow unofficial "house churches" to register and operate legally. Of course, these measures do not by any means alleviate all of our concerns, but I believe that they do demonstrate substantive progress in the right direction. We are monitoring how these new laws are being implemented and will continue to work to ensure that Vietnam follows through with the commitments contained in this past May's exchange of letters with the United States.

To deepen respect for human rights, we also maintain close ties with political activists and their families, including Dr. Pham Hong Son's wife, in order to identify and highlight abuses and to encourage efforts for reform. I regularly meet with top Vietnamese Government officials and call upon them to end the imprisonment of Dr. Son, Mr. Nguyen Vu Binh and Mr. Nguyen Khac Toan and many others. The release of Dr. Nguyen Dan Que earlier this year was a welcome result for these efforts, but it is not enough.

More broadly, through democracy and rule of law programs, we are working to heighten awareness of democratic principles at the grassroots level and develop a transparent and responsive legal system in Vietnam. Just recently, Mr. Michael Greco, the President of the American Bar Association, and Judge Andrew Wynn of the North Carolina Court of Appeals, conducted separate and extensive discussions with their Vietnamese counterparts concerning the importance of the development of rule of law as Vietnam seeks greater regional and international links. To give you another example, the United States recently sought to advance awareness of human rights and democracy issues in the media by funding Vietnamese journalists to participate in International Visitor programs entitled "U.S. Elections 2004" and "Law Enforcement and Community Development."

We also continue to fund several programs that address the protection of worker rights, including a program to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities, a project to build the capacity of the Vietnamese Government to combat the problem of child labor and a program on dispute prevention and resolution in 70 enterprises located in seven provinces.

I appreciate your letter and welcome your insights and views about Vietnam. I hope that during my time as Ambassador I will have more opportunities to hear the voices of Vietnamese-Americans so that I can better represent your community and our country here in Vietnam.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael W. Marine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Michael W. Marine