

HUMAN DIGNITY IN VIETNAM
Notes for address by Hon. David Kilgour
Parliament Hill
Ottawa
5 May 2012

Congratulations to the Vietnamese Canadian Federation in Ottawa, Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and Montreal for arranging this large event.

Two points first, partly from the Vietnam section of the *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*:

- The Vietnamese have a long tradition of independence... separation from China was obtained in BCE 939. The Americans left defeated in 1975, but many contend that Karl Marx and Marxism are so European as to be never acceptable to most Vietnamese. Vietnam has improved its standard of living only since abandoning some features of Marxist economics. Amartya Sen put this succinctly, "Freedom and development are inextricable."
- Between 1978 and 1981, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese fled, with many eventually settling in Canada. Today, they are active and successful in virtually all occupations. Most voluntary community organizations across Canada oppose the unelected regime in Hanoi, in part because it "has destroyed genuine Vietnamese culture" and seek to restore their ancient culture.



Canadians protesting human rights violations in Vietnam on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, May 5, 2012

Democracy and Inviolable Rights

Democracy is the best means of fulfilling individual lives while respecting common national, regional and local goals. These values are reflected today in the political cultures of many nations and in the aspirations of most if not all others (http://www.david-kilgour.com/2012/David_03142012.pdf). There are sadly still authoritarian regimes of various kinds in the world, including the one in Hanoi.

The next waves of democratic governance should sweep away most of the world's remaining despots. Skeptics about this should recall that in the 1980s there were many in

central/eastern Europe who predicted that the Soviet empire would survive for another 100 years. The pessimists were proved wrong.

Governments which abuse their own people often seem as indestructible as granite until months or even weeks before they disintegrate. Many of them did so in the late 1980s and 1990s. Human dignity is ultimately indivisible today on this shrunken planet. The wish to choose one's own government is probably universal in the 21st century.



Ms Le thi Cong Nhan is a Hanoi-based human rights lawyer who was jailed in May 2007 for four years for "conducting propaganda against the state."



Unified Buddhist **Supreme Patriarch Thích Quảng Độ** was confined without charge in his monastery for years under police surveillance. Four Hòa Hảo Buddhists were sentenced in 2007 to prison for protesting imprisonment of other Buddhists. Cao Đài members were in 2005 sentenced to up to 13 years in prison for delivering a petition calling for religious freedom.

Father Thadeus Nguyễn Văn Lý, calling for a democratic election and a multiparty state, was sentenced to eight years imprisonment in 2007. He subsequently suffered two strokes and was released into home detention on condition that he return to prison to serve out his sentence. Unfortunately, he appears to be again now in custody.



HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

The Human Rights Watch recommendations (24 April 2012) for the upcoming Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue appear useful for Canada too. Here is a flavour:

“During the year 2011 and the first quarter of 2012, there were many violations of human rights in Vietnam, including a steady stream of political trials and arrests. The government systematically suppresses freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly...”

“Human Rights Watch recommends that Australia focus on...four key priority areas...freedom of speech and freedom of organization;... the right to freely practise religion; police brutality; and forced labor in drug rehabilitation centers...”

(http://www.vietnamhumanrights.net/english/documents/HRW_2012.pdf)



Phạm Thanh Nghiên did advocacy work on behalf of landless farmers. In 2010, she was sentenced to four years in prison followed by three years under house arrest on charges of spreading anti-government propaganda.

Lê Công Định spoke up for bloggers, human rights defenders, and democracy and labour rights activists. In 2010, he was convicted of ‘attempts to overthrow the state’ and sentenced to five years of incarceration.



Roles for the Diaspora

- Form political action committees in each province and :
 - visit MPs, senators, MPPs/MLAs regularly to inform them about current realities in Vietnam, and
 - appoint a contact constituent for each elected representative to keep him/her and/or staff informed about developments.
- Provide Vietnamese-Canadian youth with opportunities to get the best information available about rights violations across Vietnam.
- Engage politically at all levels and get more Vietnamese-Canadians elected in the respective provinces at all three levels of government.
- Work cooperatively with existing human rights organizations, for example, the Paris-based Buddhist organization.

Check out the *Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support*, a project of the non-political Community of Democracies and managed by the NGO Council for a Community of Democracies (CCD). It is accessible at www.ccd21.org.

Conclusion

Please attempt to address the case of Viet Khang, a young musician who was jailed because he wrote two patriotic songs:

<http://freedomforvietnam.wordpress.com/2012/02/01/a-song-by-viet-khang-anh-la-ai-who-are-you/>

Citizen initiatives towards democratic governance and human rights are moving briskly in various parts of the world. The Middle East and North Africa have had their “Arab Spring”. Asia is changing from China to Malaysia to Burma/Myanmar. The time for human dignity for all to reach Hanoi and all of Vietnam is coming. Why not now?

Nguyễn Hoàng Hải (Điếu Cày) is known for hard-hitting internet postings calling for greater democracy and human rights and for participation in protests against the Chinese party-state foreign policy. In 2008, he was sentenced to 30 months in prison on tax charges.



Cù Huy Hà Vũ, legal scholar, government critic and dissident, was sentenced to seven years in prison on anti-government propaganda charges in 2011 following the country's most-high profile trial in decades. He will reportedly be retried, although the identical result appears to be pre-decided.



Lawyer **Trần Quốc Hiền** defended farmers whose land was confiscated and published articles online. In 2007, he was sentenced to five years imprisonment and two years house arrest on release for 'spreading anti-government propaganda' and 'endangering state security'.

Nhân phẩm sẽ thắng thế tại Việt Nam (Human dignity will prevail in Vietnam).

Việt Nam tự do muôn năm (Long live a Free Vietnam).

Cám ơn tất cả quý vị (Thank you)

(www.david-kilgour.com)