

Vietnam Human Rights Advocacy Day on Parliament Hill

“Recognizing and acknowledging human rights abuses - both past and present - is always important and as Canadians, we have an international obligation to step up to face violations of people’s basic rights. In Canada and around the world, the issue of human rights sanctions and the Sergei Magnitsky case have drawn strong interest, and rightly so.”, said Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, in a message of greetings to the Canadian Youth for Human Rights (CYHRV) on the occasion of the Vietnam Human Rights Advocacy Day, June 12, 2017.

After a month of intensive preparation, with the support of 60 Vietnamese organizations in Canada, Vietnam, and around the world, the event, under the sponsorship of Mr. James Bezan, M.P. (Selkirk - Interlake - Eastman, MB), was well attended with over 100 people registered from 6 cities: Kingston, Niagara, Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver. In addition, 11 Members of Parliament from various parts of Canada also agreed to meet the participants.

The event highlighted the widespread support of the Vietnamese community in Canada for Bill S-226 (*Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officers Act*, known as the 'Magnitsky Law', sponsored by Senator Raynell Andreychuk, passed by the Senate on April 11, 2017, and presented to the House of Commons by Mr. Bezan on April 13, 2017) which is currently going through the approval procedure of the House of Commons. At the same time, the organizers and supporters of the event wanted to denounce the increasingly violent and brutal repression by the Vietnamese Communist government. Many MPs, although unable to attend in person the Vietnam Human Rights Advocacy Day due to other commitments, sent greetings and expressed support for the Bill.

After a simple but solemnly ceremony of saluting the Canadian flag and the Vietnamese Heritage and Freedom flag on Parliament Hill, the Vietnam Human Rights Advocacy Day started in a meeting room of the Parliament on Queen Street, with Kim Vu as MC.

To begin, Pham Luu Ngoc Ky, CYRHV representative from Montréal, welcomed the guests and thanked all organizations and individuals who have expressed support, or took part in the organization of the event. He was followed by the introduction of the various delegations by their leaders and the greetings of two distinguished guests, Anne Quach Minh Thu, Member of Parliament for Salaberry - Surroît, Quebec, and the Honourable David Kilgour, former Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, Secretary of State, Latin America and Africa (1997–2002), and Secretary of State, Asia-Pacific (2002–2003), and a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. Next, Kim read the messages of greetings from the Honourable Catherine McKenna, and Mr. David Lametti, Member of Parliament for Saint-Emard-Verdun, Québec.

After the greetings of the guests of honour, representatives of some of the participating organizations gave their remarks, including:

- Vu Van Thai, Secretary General of the Vietnam Buddhist Congregation in the World;
- Tran Thien May, Representative of the Phan Boi Chau Youth Movement (Toronto)
- Nguyen Nhu Thanh, President of the Former Political Prisoners Association, Montréal Chapter;
- Tran Minh Thanh, Representative the Reform Party, Toronto Chapter.

Following these speakers, a three-minute video recording of a speech by Father Dang Huu Nam, still in Vietnam, was presented in which he condemned the persecution of the people and the priests, including himself, especially the victims of the Formosa environmental disaster, by the Vietnamese Communist government. Father Nam said: "Formosa acknowledged the mistake, the government received the money, the people were left with the disaster, the freedom fighters got the persecution, the patriots got the imprisonment, and the priests got the denunciation! "

The opening ceremony ended with a photo session of the delegations with the guests.

After a quick lunch break, the participants were divided into small groups for pre-arranged personal visits with various Members of Parliament in their offices to discuss violations of human rights in Vietnam and to urge them to support Bill S-226 when it is presented for a vote in the House of Commons. The participants completed the visits with a sense of optimism after receiving the attention of the MPs and their commitment to support this Bill.

At 3 o'clock, the groups visiting the MPs returned to the meeting room for de-briefing. Then all participants joined in an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the event, and finally discussed and adopted a resolution to thank Senator Andreychuk, Mr. Bezan, those who support Bill S-226, CYRHV, the participants, and the organizers of the Vietnam Human Rights Advocacy Day on Parliament Hill. Encouraged by the day's success, the participants expressed their wish to hold similar annual campaigns to draw public attention to the abuses of human rights in Vietnam and to ask for the support of their elected representatives in fighting against these abuses.

Before the meeting was over, Mr. Bezan briefly left a House of Commons meeting to meet the participants. He thanked the active community support for the Bill, and he especially appreciated the encouragement through the campaign by the Canadian Youth for Human Rights in Vietnam for a petition in support of the Bill. He hoped that this Bill will soon be passed, which will positively affect the fight for respect of human rights in Vietnam. He said:

"Vietnam's vague Criminal Code and harsh articles are responsible for the unjust imprisonment of more than 130 prisoners of conscience who only peacefully voiced their opinions. Once passed, Bill S-226, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, will be an important tool for Canada to hold Vietnamese officials accountable for the abuse and torture of prisoners of conscience and violation of internationally recognized human rights. The Vietnamese Communist Party maintains its rule through

fear. Vietnam executed 429 prisoners between August 2013 and June 2016, making it third in the world for state executions, behind China and Iran.”

The Vietnam Human Rights Advocacy Day was a complete success. It showed strong support for Bill S-226 from the Vietnamese community both inside and outside Canada. It ended at 4:15 pm.



Some early participants prepared to conduct a flag saluting ceremony on Parliament Hill

Photo: CDL



The meeting room

Photo: DMN



MP Anne Quach Minh Thu and Hon. David Kilgour and the participants
Photo: DMN



MP Anne Quach Minh Thu and Hon. David Kilgour and the participants
Photo: DCT



MP Anne Quach Minh Thu and Hon. David Kilgour and the participants
Photo: DK



Hien Ho presented documents on violations of human rights in Vietnam
to MP James Bezan
Photo: HQ

Ha Quyen, June 17, 2017