



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

May 12, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

In advance of the upcoming US-ASEAN Summit (May 12-13), we ask that in your meeting with Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh of Vietnam you explicitly raise concern about his government's antagonistic policies towards religious minorities, indigenous communities, and political dissidents, and instruct State Department officials to do the same in meetings with their counterparts.

While we welcome the opportunity for expanded robust, regional diplomacy and the strengthening ties with partners in the region, we need to emphasize the need for shared goals and common principles. To that end, the upcoming US-ASEAN Summit will be an opportune forum to highlight the importance of human rights and freedom of expression.

More to the point, we believe that a freer Vietnam – which has the potential to be a strategic partner of the United States against the People's Republic of China's hegemonistic ambitions – would advance critical national interests of the United States. While the Vietnamese people as a whole are very patriotic, we are concerned by reports that members of the Vietnamese Communist Party are becoming increasingly compromised economically and politically by Communist China. Further evidence of increasing ties between these two communist parties is evidence, recently cited by the Uyghur Tribunal chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice, that Vietnam has repatriated Uyghurs to China at the request of the PRC government, and, per the Department of Homeland Security, is importing cotton from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region for reexport, thus helping the PRC bypass sanctions prescribed in the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act which you signed into law earlier this year. Accordingly, U.S. policy should press for expanding freedom for the Vietnamese people, and not support the privileged Communist Party elites who oppress them.

We specifically ask that the United States raise concerns over harassment, intimidation, and persecution of the religious and indigenous communities including Cao Dai followers who refuse to join the government-created "1997 Sect," the independent Hoa Hao Buddhists, the members of the Unified Buddhist Church, the members of Montagnard and Hmong house churches, and Catholic priests who are leaders in fighting for environmental justice.

Of particular concern are government-supported – and government-supporting – Red Flag groups that routinely attack Catholic priests and members of the Unified Buddhist Church, a phenomenon reported on by Radio Free Asia, among others.

We also request that you resolutely raise the release of prisoners of conscience with your Vietnamese counterpart, including Hoa Hao Buddhists Nguyen Bac Truyen, Bui Van Trung, and Bui Van Tham; Catholic environmental justice advocate Nguyen Van Hoá; Montagnard Pastors Y Pum Bya and Y Yich; and Buddhist Phan Van Thu.

Given the egregious nature of Vietnam’s violations of religious freedom, we also believe that you should instruct the State Department to place Vietnam on its list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), aligning with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom’s longstanding – and we believe correct – listing of Vietnam as a CPC.

Additionally, please advocate for press and internet freedom, and raise the conviction and nine-year sentence imposed upon the prominent Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang, who has published extensively on human rights and alleged police brutality in Vietnam.

In conclusion, we request that you highlight these ongoing serious concerns, which remain an obstacle to greater engagement with the Government of Vietnam, and that you remind Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh of Vietnam’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam is a State Party.

Thank you, and we wish you a successful Summit.

Sincerely,



REP. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH



REP. ZOE LOFGREN



REP. J. LUIS CORREA



REP. MICHELLE STEEL



REP. YOUNG KIM



REP. ALAN LOWENTHAL

cc: The Hon. Antony J. Blinken