



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

AUG 10 2012

Dear Mr. Wolf:

This letter responds to your recent letters to President Obama and Secretary Clinton regarding human rights and religious freedom in Vietnam. We have been asked to respond on behalf of the President.

Advancing human rights, religious freedom, and political freedom around the world is one of this Administration's highest foreign policy priorities. In pursuit of that goal, Ambassador David Shear has made human rights one of his highest priorities in our bilateral engagement with Vietnam since arriving in Hanoi last August.

Ambassador Shear began publicly pointing out the need for improvements in Vietnam's human rights practices soon after his August 2011 arrival in Hanoi. At his inaugural press conference last September, Ambassador Shear noted that we "disagree sharply" with Vietnam's human rights practices and that he would "vigorously pursue" a human rights agenda with the Vietnamese government. Ambassador Shear raised the need for progress on human rights in nearly all his introductory meetings with senior Vietnamese officials and continues to do so today. Our message to Vietnamese leaders has been consistent: the American people will not support broad advances in political and economic relations between the United States and Vietnam without demonstrable progress on human rights and religious freedom. We have repeatedly urged progress in the release of all political prisoners, including Father Ly, Le Cong Dinh, and Dieu Cay; increased political and civil rights, including internet freedom; rule of law; and expanded religious freedom, including more church registrations and the translation of the Bible into the Hmong language.

Ambassador Shear and his staff have met and continue to meet regularly with representatives of various denominations to advance our commitment to promoting religious freedom. When security personnel attacked Catholic

The Honorable  
Frank R. Wolf,  
House of Representatives.

Redemptorists in Hanoi in late 2011, the Embassy immediately responded by meeting with parishioners and repeatedly raising our strong concerns with government officials. Ambassador Shear has also met with senior officials from Vietnam's Commission for Religious Affairs in order to press for an increase in the number of church registrations in the Northwest Highlands and translation of the Bible into the Modern Hmong language.

Ambassador Shear and his staff continue to press Vietnamese authorities at every opportunity to release Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan (Richard Nguyen) and have used the visits of high-level U.S. officials, including Secretary Clinton, to underscore the case with senior officials in the Vietnamese government. Soon after learning of Dr. Nguyen's detention, our Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City began regular contact with Mrs. Nguyen, and U.S. diplomats meet with Dr. Nguyen in prison to monitor his condition and provide our full consular assistance.

To further demonstrate to the Government of Vietnam our commitment to human rights, Ambassador Shear hosted a meeting with three of Vietnam's leading human rights and civil society advocates during the January visit to Hanoi of Senators McCain, Lieberman, Whitehouse, and Ayotte. This event marks the very first time that these three human rights and civil society leaders (all under heavy surveillance) were brought together for a meeting of this kind.

Our Embassy's advocacy efforts on specific cases over the past eleven months have achieved some success. Public attention and private pressure helped lead to the release of Bui Thi Minh Hang, a well known democracy activist sentenced to five years in a re-education camp last December. Ms. Hang has stated to us on several occasions that her release would not have been possible without the Embassy's engagement.

Addressing broader systemic human rights issues, including promoting freedom of expression, the U.S. Mission in Vietnam, under the direction of Ambassador Shear, is at the forefront of a comprehensive like-minded effort with fellow members of the Coalition for Freedom Online. The Coalition is a cross-regional group of states committed to working together to advance Internet freedom, to protest Vietnam's new decrees that threaten to censor foreign broadcasters in Vietnam and impose controls on Vietnam's blogosphere, including decrees that would require Google, Yahoo, and other major international companies to censor or take down "objectionable" content as defined by the Vietnamese government.

We have also emphasized media training to build skills in Vietnam's politically repressive environment, including a ten-day program on investigative reporting, providing resources from Washington's Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund for our Fulbright alumni to lead intensive training sessions, and an Embassy-funded week-long training course that paired non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders and journalists to design media campaigns based on key civil society themes.

Furthermore, the State Department has worked with NGOs to bolster civil society and strengthen the capacity of legal advocacy and judicial reform. The State Department has provided support to the American Bar Association's Rule of Law Initiative to provide training workshops for lawyers and the judiciary to strengthen capacity for legal advocacy and promote international standards in judicial reform and transparency in trial procedures in Vietnam. In addition, we have provided assistance to other NGOs to develop Vietnam's civil society, address gender inequality, promote good governance with a focus on women, and improve education for provincial and ethnic minority groups.

Earlier this year, Ambassador Shear participated in a town hall event with members of the Vietnamese-American community of Northern Virginia to discuss human rights, religious freedom, and other key issues in our bilateral relationship. He reiterated our message that progress on human rights was necessary for progress in other areas. Although the Ambassador was forced by a family emergency to postpone a similar program in California, he intends to conduct further meetings with the Vietnamese-American community in the future.

The activities and events described above provide only a partial list of the many things the State Department, our Embassy and Consulate in Vietnam, and, more specifically, Ambassador Shear have been doing to promote human rights, religious freedom, democracy, and freedom of speech and of the press in Vietnam. Many other actions, such as our invitations to Embassy events, are not publicized, as doing so would be counterproductive. We know from previous experience that publicity can also jeopardize the safety of Vietnamese dissidents and their families as well as our shared goals in Vietnam.

As a matter of long-established policy, the Department of State does not release invitation lists to any events, including our Fourth of July events overseas. That policy is in part intended to prevent invitees from being questioned or harassed in conjunction with the receipt of an invitation, to protect individuals who work quietly and most effectively outside the public eye, and to honor the wishes of human rights and freedom advocates who voluntarily work with us and prefer to

remain anonymous to reduce attention they may garner from repressive governments, such as that in Vietnam.

We trust you will find this information responsive to your concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D S Adams', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David S. Adams  
Assistant Secretary  
Legislative Affairs