

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 6, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We are writing to urge you to make human rights improvements a top priority in your upcoming meeting with Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong, Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party. For twenty years, the United States Government has cultivated a close relationship with the government of Vietnam. However, Vietnam remains a one-party state that treats many of its own citizens – particularly those who share the U.S. commitment to freedom and democracy – in ways that systematically transgress the minimum standards expected of any government that wishes to be a member in the community of civilized nations.

As the United States Government contemplates a comprehensive trade and security partnership with the Vietnamese government, your Administration should insist that our prospective partner immediately and unconditionally free all political prisoners and other prisoners of conscience. There are approximately 150 imprisoned religious and political dissidents whose names have been compiled by human rights organizations, as well as hundreds of others from ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples who are being held in remote areas of the country.

It is also essential that the Vietnamese government eliminate the onerous requirement that all religious organizations, and even informal religious groups, submit to pre-approval and rigorous supervision by the government as a prerequisite for religious activities. Decree 92, which took effect on January 1, 2013, prohibits religious activities by churches, religious communities and religious institutions that are not registered and approved by the government. The draft law currently being considered in the Vietnamese National Assembly would solidify this requirement and further impede freedom of religion.

The Vietnamese government should repeal its overly burdensome and restrictive laws and administrative decrees that deny freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly – such as the laws criminalizing “propaganda against the state” and “taking advantage of democratic freedoms to injure the national unity”. The Vietnamese government should stop arresting pro-democracy bloggers and others who use the Internet to disagree with the government peacefully, and it should release those who are being imprisoned on such grounds. In 2013, the Vietnamese Prime Minister issued an order (Decree 72) to further restrict Internet freedom. Transparency and the free flow of information are critical to genuine free trade, and especially to ensuring that the benefits of expanded trade are enjoyed

by the Vietnamese people and not just Communist Party officials.

The Vietnamese government must permit the existence of a real civil society consisting of genuinely independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Vietnam, no genuine NGOs are allowed to exist. Instead, the government has created dozens of artificial NGOs that are actually controlled by the Communist Party. The “Fatherland Front” and the “Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations” are the umbrella organizations through which the Communist Party controls these artificial NGOs.

The Vietnamese government should respect the labor rights of Vietnamese workers, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) should incorporate monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms to ensure Vietnam’s compliance with international standards on labor rights. We echo the point you made in a recent speech in Beaverton, Oregon, that “if Vietnam or any of the other countries in this trade agreement don’t meet these requirements, they’ll face meaningful consequences.”

The Vietnamese government should end the practice of forced labor and prosecute officials of state-owned labor export companies that are involved in fraudulent recruitment and other practices that constitute or facilitate human trafficking. The Vietnamese government appears to be squarely behind human trafficking – by subjecting hundreds of thousands of its citizens to forced labor in “rehabilitation” centers, detention centers and prisons, as well as by sending tens of thousands of its citizens into modern-day slavery in countries around the world and punishing those victims who speak out.

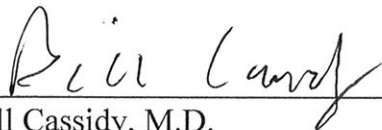
Finally, the Vietnamese government should agree to a mediation process to review claims for compensation made by U.S. citizens whose property has been confiscated. Since 1975, the Vietnamese government has illegally confiscated the property of many U.S. citizens. In 1995, during the Clinton Administration, the Vietnamese government paid \$208 million in compensation for confiscated properties to 200 Americans. Vietnam, however, continues its practice of illegal confiscation of real and other property of Vietnamese-Americans.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership should not serve as simply another trade agreement. As the collective name suggests, TPP should send a message to the international community that its member nations consider one another as trusted partners. As such, all nations in the TPP agreement should have a common commitment to religious freedoms and human values. Congress instructed as much when it unanimously passed an amendment to the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) bill that requires the Administration to consider the religious freedom conditions of potential trade partners. While negotiating with the Vietnamese government, the U.S. should insist on the changes in the Vietnamese government policies and practices set forth above.

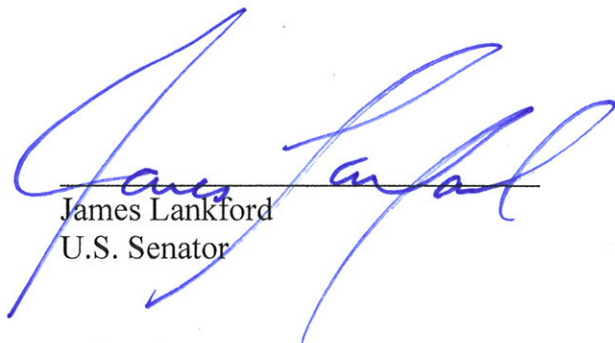
As the United States and Vietnam mark 20 years of diplomatic relations, and discuss further rapprochement, it is imperative that Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong understands that further

expansion of trade and security relationships with the Vietnamese government should be contingent upon significant and irreversible improvements in human rights practices.

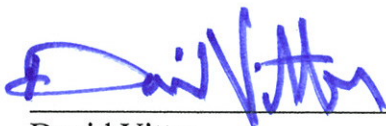
Sincerely,



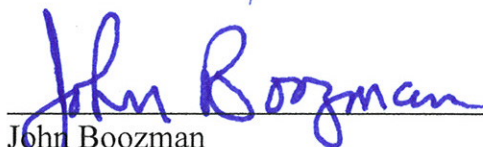
Bill Cassidy, M.D.
U.S. Senator



James Lankford
U.S. Senator



David Vitter
U.S. Senator



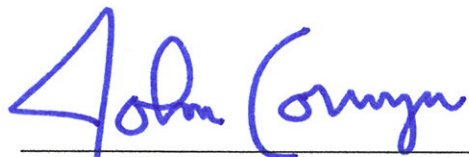
John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



John Cornyn
U.S. Senator