

**Joint Statement Regarding the Upcoming Meeting
between U.S. President Barack Obama
and Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang**

July 24, 2013

The upcoming visit to the United States by President Truong Tan Sang of Vietnam presents an opportunity for U.S. President Barack Obama to reiterate his Administration's position that Vietnam's "backsliding" on human rights is a stumbling block to expanded trade and security collaboration between the two countries. Likewise, this is an opportunity for the Vietnamese leadership to demonstrate their commitment to internationally recognized human rights.

We, the undersigned organizations, would like to see expanded U.S.-Vietnam partnership in the context of greater respect for human rights. We strongly believe that President Obama should insist on the full release of all Vietnamese political prisoners and other prisoners of conscience. At the same time we call on the Vietnamese government to agree to the following steps as milestones:

(1) Immediate and unconditional release of Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu, independent journalist Nguyen Van Hai (aka Dieu Cay), and blogger Ta Phong Tan.

Dr. Vu, a constitutional scholar who fought for environmental justice and the rights of indigenous peoples, is serving a seven-year sentence for "propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam". He suffers congenital heart problems, acute migraine, unstable blood pressure, high cholesterol, and persistent skin rashes. Dr. Vu needs medical treatment and round-the-clock care. Last month he held a 25-day hunger strike to protest the abject prison conditions.

Last year the U.S. State Department highlighted Dieu Cay's courage, making his case the first in a series of profiles of bloggers and journalists honored on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day. Speaking on that occasion, President Obama specifically called on the international community to not forget Dieu Cay. He is serving a 12-year sentence for "disseminating anti-state information and materials." He is on hunger strike to protest the abject prison conditions.

On International Women's Day of this year the U.S. First Lady and Secretary of State John Kerry jointly honored blogger Ta Phong Tan as a woman of courage. She started a blog called Truth and Justice to expose corruption in the Vietnamese legal system. She was arrested in 2011 and sentenced to ten years in prison.

The release of these three prominent prisoners of conscience would be viewed as a positive development and a significant effort toward improving human rights practices in Vietnam. We are confident that this will set a positive tone for President Sang's upcoming meeting with President Obama.

(2) Release of all known Vietnamese political prisoners and other prisoners of conscience prior to the upcoming ASEAN Summit in Brunei, where U.S. President Barack Obama reportedly will hold a side meeting with Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung.

International human rights organizations have documented at least 150 political prisoners and other prisoners of conscience. The Vietnamese government should release all such prisoners unconditionally before the upcoming ASEAN Summit.

Reports of several hundred other such prisoners, particularly among ethnic and religious minorities in highland areas, have been difficult to confirm because the government severely restricts access to these areas.

As the confirmation process may take time, the government of Vietnam should agree to a timeline for verification, which is to start immediately. Verified political prisoners and other prisoners of conscience should then be gradually released from prison in groups and no later than the end of this year.

(3) Prison visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross, UN agencies, and international human rights organizations to inspect the conditions in Vietnamese prisons and detention centers.

We urge the Vietnamese government to end the arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention of people who peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, and religious belief.

The government should ensure that all detained suspects and prisoners are treated in accordance with international human rights standards. Detainees should have prompt access to a lawyer of their choice, be promptly brought before a court, and not be subject to torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

We also urge the government to fully apply international standards on the treatment of prisoners and conditions of detention, in particular by enacting into legislation and adhering to the U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Regular and unhindered prison visits by credible parties such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and international human rights organizations will help verify such adherence.

Signed by:

Boat People SOS (BPSOS)

Burma Partnership

Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam

Con Dau Parishioners Association

Council for Human Rights in Vietnam

Environmental Defense Law Center

Hmong National Development

Human Rights Watch

ICT Watch Philippines

INDIGENOUS

International Office of Champa

The Lantos Foundation

Vietnamese Committee on Justice and Peace of the Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston