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Honorable Nguyễn Thanh Sơn  
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Chairman, State Commission on Overseas Vietnamese  
Social Republic of Vietnam

Dear Deputy Minister Son:

I received your letter requesting me to host a meeting with your delegation to clear up "misunderstandings" between the Vietnamese American community and the government of Vietnam. At this point, I must decline.

The premise of a meeting to dispel so-called "misinformation" is misguided and certainly not a constructive starting point for dialogue. The Vietnamese who chose to risk their lives to leave their home country have no misunderstanding of the government of Vietnam. They left because they could not live under a totalitarian regime which disregards human and religious freedom right, and punishes citizens who dare to speak up.

The history of communism in Vietnam is still fresh in the memory of many who suffered as a result of the bloody land reform in the 1950's and the more recent "re-education" camps. This is to say nothing of many dissidents who your government continues to imprison because they call for democracy and freedom. Vietnamese Americans chose not to live in a police-state where people have no voice in the governance of their country. In fact, most Vietnamese who came here chose to become American citizens for the very reason that the United States Constitution explicitly guarantees the freedom and liberty that are endowed on each human person.

I, like most Vietnamese Americans, desire a strong and prosperous Vietnam. It is only natural that one would have goodwill for one's homeland. However, I believe that when people can exercise the right to think for themselves and speak their mind, real innovations can begin and a free Vietnam will be even stronger and more prosperous. In such an environment, many capable Vietnamese Americans would enthusiastically seek to contribute in making Vietnam a better country.

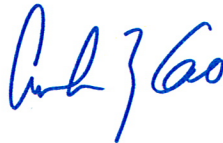
There are numerous steps the government of Vietnam can take to address the concerns of Vietnamese Americans. Including:

- Release all prisoners of conscience such as Nguyen Van Dai, Vu Hung, Le Cong Dinh, Nguyen Tien Trung, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, among numerous others;
- Release all prisoners held on trumped-up charges such as writer Tran Khai Thanh Thuy;
- Stop harassing democracy advocates such as Mr. Nguyen Thanh Giang and Dr. Pham Hong Son;
- Return seized properties to religious institutions and allow religions to practice their faiths;
- Stop all destruction of religious symbols and properties, and the physical and mental abuses of religious adherents;
- Release all ethnic minority pastors who have been detained for years;
- Additionally, paying the victims of the Daewoosa human trafficking case as ruled by the High Court of American Samoa against your government will show that Vietnam will abide by the rule of law.

These are concrete and reasonable steps. As the only Vietnamese American serving in Congress, I insist on a showing of good-faith by the government of Vietnam to address the issues that concern the Vietnamese American community. Only then can we begin the process of healing the many deep wounds that divide us and have frank and open dialogues on substantive issues of mutual interest.

Until the government of Vietnam is serious about protecting human rights and religious freedom, your appeals to the Vietnamese American community will continue to fall on deaf ears. I await your response.

Sincerely,



Anh "Joseph" Cao  
Member of Congress