

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 28, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
U.S. Secretary of State
The State Department
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We write to highlight our concerns with press freedom in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, a key regional power in Southeast Asia and a potential economic and strategic partner for the United States.

More than four decades after the end of the Vietnam War, and following normalization of relations with the United States, Vietnam remains a one-party communist state with little tolerance for dissent. We are concerned by the Government of Vietnam's widespread campaign of intimidation, pressure, and arrests of journalists, independent media, and the free press. The following incidents concern journalists with and contributors to Radio Free Asia (RFA) and Voice of America (VOA), both among the networks that are part of the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

In 2017, Vietnamese authorities arrested and sentenced Nguyen Van Hoa — a videographer with RFA's Vietnamese language service — to seven years in prison and three years of house arrest. The Vietnamese authorities invoked Article 88 of the Penal Code, an anti-state provision that carries a maximum 20-year prison term for “propagandizing” against the state. Vietnamese authorities had previously beaten and confiscated Mr. Nguyen's equipment while he was on assignment for RFA in November 2016. In his personal capacity as a citizen journalist, Mr. Nguyen had published videos of protests arising out of the 2016 Formosa Steel marine life disaster¹.

In 2018, blogger and journalist Le Anh Hung was arrested under Article 331 of the Criminal Code for “abusing democratic freedoms.” That charge carries a jail sentence of up to seven years. Mr. Le is a member of the Independent Journalists' Association, which campaigns for press freedom in Vietnam, and he is a regular contributor to VOA. Days before his arrest, he had criticized Vietnam's new cybersecurity legislation in a VOA commentary. He has also written an open letter to the country's leaders criticizing their

1. *Vietnamese Activist Accused of “abusing democratic freedoms,”* AsiaNews (Feb. 6, 2017), <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Vietnamese-activist-accused-of-abusing-democratic-freedoms-39863.html>.

2. “RFA Blogger Who Disappeared in Bangkok is Being Held in Hanoi, Says Daughter,” Radio Free Asia (March 20, 2019).

3. 100 Information Heroes, Reporters Without Borders (May 9, 2014). https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Presse/Downloads/Helden_der_Pressefreiheit/ROG-Helden_der_Pressefreiheit_2014.pdf

plans to open new economic zones that will allow foreign companies to take lengthy leases on land. Mr. Le is still under pre-trial investigation.”

On January 26, 2019, independent journalist and RFA contributor Truong Duy Nhat was abducted in Bangkok, Thailand a day after he registered for refugee status and requested asylum at the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In March 2019, international media reported that Mr. Truong is being held without charges at Hanoi’s T-16 detention center under the authority of the Ministry of Public Security.²

Mr. Truong is a dissident blogger and a former journalist with state-run newspapers “Bao Cong An Quang Nam Danang” and “Dai Doan Ket.” He resigned in 2010 and has since become a prolific and outspoken dissident. Since 2011, he has published a blog, “Mot Goc Nhin Khac” (Another Point of View), widely known for its criticisms of the Vietnamese government and for shining a light on violations of human rights, free speech, and freedom of the press. Reporters Without Borders recognized Mr. Truong as one of 100 “heroes” who have helped promote the freedom enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — the freedom to “seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”³ The Vietnamese government previously arrested Mr. Truong and sentenced him to two years imprisonment under Article 258(2) of the Criminal Code for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State.”

In light of these recent and troubling incidents, we request that, by June 17, 2019, you respond to the following questions:

1. What is the State Department doing to advocate for the release of these individuals?
2. Has the U.S. embassy in Bangkok asked Thai authorities about their ongoing investigation into Mr. Truong’s abduction from Thailand? If so when, and what response has been received? If not, why not?
3. Will the State Department consider measures against Vietnamese authorities if these individuals are not released, including sanctions and additional restrictions on travel and assets of Vietnamese officials involved in these human rights abuses?

Vietnam is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and as such has committed to respecting individual freedoms of belief, speech, association, press, and the right to uphold assembly and political expression. The United States has an obligation to both raise these egregious human and political rights violations with its Vietnamese counterparts and take steps to attempt to shape the behavior of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

1. *Vietnamese Activist Accused of “abusing democratic freedoms,”* AsiaNews (Feb. 6, 2017), <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Vietnamese-activist-accused-of-abusing-democratic-freedoms-39863.html>.

2. “RFA Blogger Who Disappeared in Bangkok is Being Held in Hanoi, Says Daughter,” Radio Free Asia (March 20, 2019).

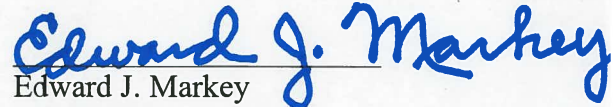
3. 100 Information Heroes, Reporters Without Borders (May 9, 2014). https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Presse/Downloads/Helden_der_Pressefreiheit/ROG-Helden_der_Pressefreiheit_2014.pdf

If you have any questions about these requests, please contact Ngoc Nguyen (ngoc.nguyen@mail.house.gov) in the office of Rep. Alan Lowenthal or Satrajit Sardar (Satrajit_Sardar@markey.senate.gov) in the office of Senator Ed Markey.

Sincerely,



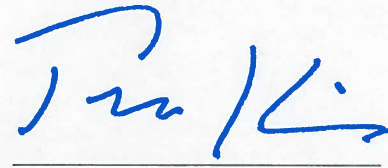
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



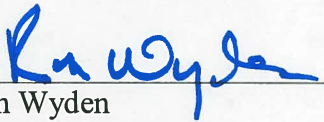
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



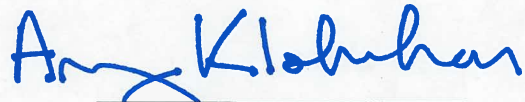
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



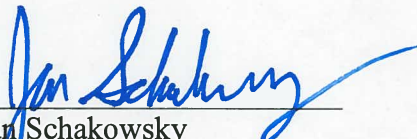
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



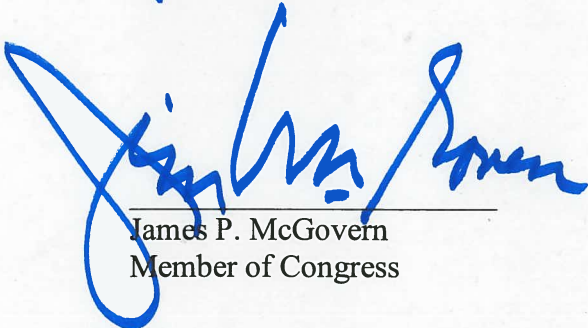
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



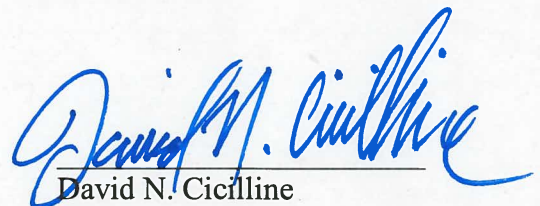
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress




Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



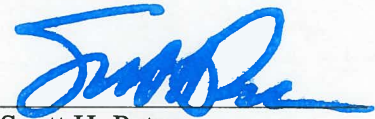
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



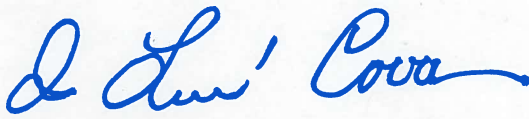
Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



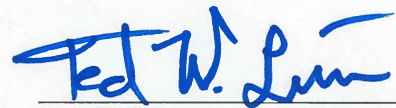
Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress



Karen Bass
Member of Congress



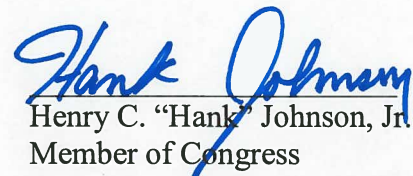
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



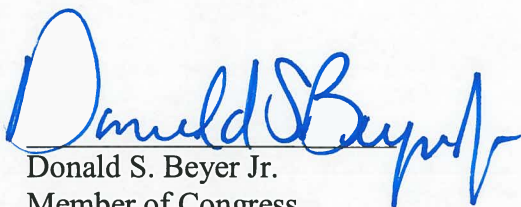
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



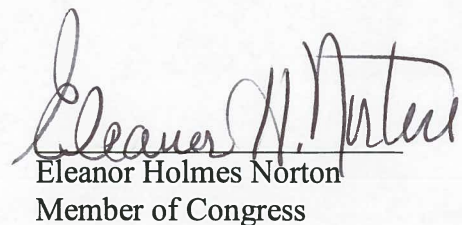
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress