



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

SDIR • NUMBER 073 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, May 28, 2015

—
Vice-Chair

Mr. Wayne Marston

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, May 28, 2015

• (1305)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP)): This is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. This is meeting 73. We have some presenters here with us today who have been invited to speak on the human rights situation in Vietnam.

Just before that, there are a couple of quick things. There are to be no cameras during the session, please, no picture-taking.

As well, to the presenters, if you can keep your presentations under 10 minutes, it gives a little more time for the members to ask you questions. We have Vietnamese translation here, back and forth, so that will make it a little bit easier.

Before we go to that part of our meeting, we have a notice of motion that was delivered by Mr. Cotler. We have agreement to receive it here today.

Go ahead, Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is something I raised in the last meeting, about inviting Mr. Yigal Carmon, the president of MEMRI, to come and address us on the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, with particular reference to ISIS, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the like. We had approval in principle, but it was to be framed in the form of a motion so that we could then arrange for his testimony in the ensuing days of our hearings. That's the motion before us.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Thank you very much.

We'll move to our presentations now. Have you, amongst yourselves, decided who would like to go first?

Ms. Nguyen, please proceed, then. Thank you very much.

Ms. Trinh Nguyen (Communications Director and Organizer, Viet Tan): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, good afternoon.

Thank you for this opportunity to add to the testimony on the human rights situation in Vietnam. Last month, you heard from my

colleague and chairman of Viet Tan, Mr. Do Hoang Diem. I hope the hearing today not only enriches and adds to your understanding but spurs you to action.

As you may know, the Government of Vietnam has prevented many human rights activists from leaving the country to attend conferences, meet with regional human rights groups, or appear in front of committees such as this. The Vietnamese government often employs tactics such as withholding or confiscating passports when they arrive at the airport. My organization, Viet Tan, has documented over 30 such travel bans in the last two years.

It's especially fortunate, then, to have these two gentlemen here today to bear witness to police brutality and the daily repression they face in their work. Mr. Truong Minh Tam is a human rights defender and a former political prisoner. He'll be able to give a first-hand account of his experiences in arbitrary confinement and the harrowing prison torture of his friend, Dang Xuan Dieu, a well-known social activist. Reverend Nguyen Manh Hung, a noted religious leader, represents the Interfaith Council, one of Vietnam's first truly independent civil society groups.

Originally, two family members of those who've received some of the longest prison sentences were supposed to be here. They were unable to travel from Vietnam for this hearing. I would like to submit their testimony to the committee at a later date.

Many human rights defenders and political activists in Vietnam face daily repression in the form of police surveillance, interrogation, and beatings. Those who become targets of the Hanoi regime are arrested, often under arbitrary charges, and denied adequate legal representation. The proceedings that follow are often show trials.

Such a travesty took place in January 2013 in one of the largest political trials to take place in Vietnam in recent years. In total, 14 peaceful activists were sentenced to 86 years in jail. Today, I was supposed to have images of these individuals, which I will submit to you at a later date. But I want to mention them by name just because they received the longest sentences: Mr. Dang Xuan Dieu, 13 years; Mr. Ho Duc Hoa, 13 years; Ms. Nguyen Dang Minh Man, eight years.

In November 2013 the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that this detention and conviction of these activists for their peaceful activities was in violation of international law. The working group called on the Vietnamese authorities to release these activists and to compensate them for their arbitrary detention. My organization has used this tactic in the past to work directly with the United Nations to contest these arbitrary arrests and has ruled that these individuals were indeed held in arbitrary detention.

If you were to ask Vietnamese officials, they'll retort that there are only criminals in their jail cells. We know this to be untrue. It is not a crime to advocate for freedom of expression, for political freedom as in the case of Ms. Minh Man. I want to particularly focus on her case because she and I are about the same age and are both human rights activists. I was fortunate enough to have left Vietnam as a political refugee in 1992. I feel that if her family had not been denied political asylum and sent back to a refugee camp in Thailand in the 1990s, she would now be an activist in the Vietnamese diaspora, perhaps testifying here today.

Instead, she has been in a Vietnamese prison for the last four years. She was charged with subversion and initially sentenced to nine years in prison. A freelance photojournalist, she documented the courageous acts of ordinary Vietnamese who painted the initials "HS.TS.VN", which is a tag signed in public to affirm Vietnamese sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. She is currently held in prison camp 5 in Thanh Hoa province, a facility known for its ill treatment of political prisoners. She has been made to perform arduous physical labour, detained in isolation, and is prohibited from participating in recreational activities. Like many others who have been mistreated or even tortured in prison, Minh Man has undergone two hunger strikes in protest. She has willingly denied what little food she is offered in order to bring attention to her mistreatment.

• (1310)

For Mr. Dieu, Mr. Hoa, and Ms. Minh Man, their courageous dissidence may have placed them in jail, but it is their resistance and resiliency in the face of beatings and denial of adequate food and water that should spur us all to action.

The number of political prisoners in arbitrary confinement in Vietnam is unclear because of the repressive and secretive nature with which many of these arrests happen. The cases that we do know about are because of the tireless work of these gentlemen sitting next to me and those in Vietnam who risk their safety to document arrests and attend closed trials.

Equally important is the role that the international community plays in shining a spotlight on these cases.

I have essentially two simple concrete suggestions for this committee and Parliament today. I urge you, Mr. Chairman, to consider a mechanism to adopt these individuals as prisoners of conscience so that the public may know their stories. When you stand in solidarity with these individuals, their cause becomes your cause. International support is not only desirable but is also the best guarantee for their safety.

An example of this is that when you do take on their case, you would send a letter to the Vietnamese government to raise their case

and to press it. Also, in trade agreements, when human rights are being talked about in discussions, these cases should always come up. There should be a list, a priority list of individuals who are most important to you, and you should always ask for their freedom. That's how you negotiate and how you can press for their freedom.

Additionally, Parliament can press the Canadian embassy in Hanoi to make prison visits to ensure that visitation rights, access to medical treatment, and access to adequate food and clean water are being honoured. It is oftentimes when officials from foreign governments visit these prisons that you can ensure such rights are being honoured.

Today I want to quote Mr. Irwin Cotler's fine words on the case of Iranian human rights activists.

You said, "For the remarkable and courageous individuals who dare to challenge the regime, telling their stories is the very least we can do."

I feel that this applies to the case of Vietnam's prisoners of conscience. We should not only name the perpetrators of human rights violations but honour those in Vietnam who are working tirelessly to champion rights. We should tell the world their stories.

I want to yield my time to these two gentlemen, because they have travelled quite far. I will hand it over to Reverend Hung.

• (1315)

Mr. Hung Nguyen (Reverend, Interfaith Council of Vietnam) (Interpretation): Good afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, first of all I would like to express my gratitude to you all for your concern about the human rights situation in Vietnam and for having extended an invitation to us to take part in this meeting today.

I am Pastor Nguyen Hung. I am in charge of the Mennonite church of Chuong Bo in Vietnam. It is an independent Mennonite church. I'm also a member of the Interfaith Council of Vietnam.

I would like to do my presentation in my capacity as a witness and also as a representative of the Interfaith Council of Vietnam, which consists of high-ranking priests of the five big religions in Vietnam, namely: Cao Dai, Catholicism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, and also the Protestant church.

As a member of the Interfaith Council, I would like to present three main points in my presentation.

First is the general assessment on current conditions of religious freedom in Vietnam.

According to state-owned media, Vietnam appears to be a place with respect for religious freedom and religious development, a country in which many places of worship and religious institutions are built, as well as a place of small religious festivals and a place where people from abroad can come to learn about religions. The reality is that these features come with positive practice of a faith. Religious groups are only allowed these fundamental rights in exchange for silence in the face of injustices committed by the government.

The government only bestows approval and privileges to those people who follow the guidelines and the instructions of the government. On the contrary, other religious practices and religious ceremonies and instructions that are not compatible with the government are not allowed.

● (1320)

They are not allowed to carry out unlimited social and humanitarian activities. They are not allowed to own real estate or to change, expand, or narrow their facilities. They are not allowed to come into contact with overseas organizations, with international organizations. As well, they're not allowed to send people abroad or to invite people from abroad for religious purposes. All of these basic rights needed for religious worship are absent and not available in Vietnam.

If we want to do something, then we have to get the approval of the government, which involves waiting a long time and a lot of strict conditions with which the government tries to discourage us. All these obstacles are designed to lower the quality of the leadership of the religions, to prevent religious people from engaging in society, and also to make religious activities less effective and discourage the expansion of the influence of religions in society. That is precisely the hidden goal of the law on religious faith, which the government is prepared to promulgate very soon.

The Interfaith Council has prepared and sent a letter of protest on this bill, which was made public on May 10, 2015. Our view is that the state is plotting to apply pressure on the church.

● (1325)

That is precisely what the government plans to impose on the religions in Vietnam. This bill continues to apply a mechanism of application for approval with all kinds of permits required in order to control, suppress, and undermine the religious churches. The language of the bill is very imprecise and ambiguous so that it would let the people of the local authority interpret it as they like.

The sections in the bill are self-contradictory and also they go against the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in article 18. It also goes against the constitution of Vietnam of 2013 under article 24. Basically those are the points we mentioned in the protest letter that we made public to the government.

In the second part of my presentation, I would like to mention a few events and facts to prove the religious suppression.

After April 30, 1975, the Government of Vietnam had confiscated properties, lands, and facilities of many religious organizations. They also created pressures and suppressed brutally the independent religious sects, especially the Cao Dai religion. They also tried to interfere and stop the religious meetings of the local Cao Dai organizations. They also created disturbances and dispersed the religious worship. They occupied the facilities of the church, for instance like in the Kho Hien Trang in Tien Giang, and Tuy An in Phu Yen.

● (1330)

They also brutally suppressed and stopped the meeting of the Interfaith Council on May 7, 2015.

With the Catholic Church, they continued to detain Reverend Ly and they harassed Bishop Hoang Duc Oanh in Kontum. They also pressured the Saigon Redemptorists to cease defending the oppressed and the human rights defenders.

Concerning the Hoa Hao religion, they continued detention of many dignitaries and followers, such as Chairman Le Quang Liem. They prohibited and vandalized the ceremonies. They assaulted and beat the attendees. They destroyed small Buddhist temples and they used a state-run Buddhist section to defame the cardinal virtues of the teachings of Huynh Giao.

With the Unified Buddhist Church, they intend to grab land and occupy the temple at Thu Thiem, Saigon. They also harass the priests and the nuns in temples and monasteries throughout the country. They prevent the people at the Phuoc Thanh temple from taking care of the war wounded of the former members of the South Vietnamese republic. They continue surveillance and harassment of the venerable Thich Quang Do and the venerable Thich Khong Tanh.

With the Protestant Church, they continue to repress violently Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, and the Mennonite Binh Duong group. This was between 2014 and 2015, and they also destroyed their facilities.

They hired thugs to vandalize my own home, the home of Pastor Nguyen Manh Hung. I'm in charge of the Chuong Bo church. They also threatened many pastors and prevented them to take part in the interfaith religious council. They imprisoned Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh for 11 years and Pastor Duong Kim Khai for five years.

This is the third part. These are the recommendations and suggestions we would like to make to the Canadian government.

We would like to request that the Canadian government and members of Parliament always bring up the issue of religious freedom in the discussions and the visits for assistance to Vietnam. The assistance from your country will really bring benefits to the religious groups and to all the people of Vietnam.

● (1335)

With your experience in a free and democratic society where all religions' worship is considered like that of any regular citizen, and in which the relationship between the state and the church is defined in a number of conventions, we ask you to please raise your concerns from the Canadian point of view about the bill regarding religions in Vietnam, because this is an attempt to impose more restrictions on religious activities in Vietnam. It also tries to suppress the voice for religious freedom, which is why the movement for human rights is rising.

Please pressure the Vietnamese government to release all political and religious prisoners and also the prisoners of conscience who have been detained in the fight for freedom and for the freedom to practise their religion. Especially, you have to ask Vietnam to respect religious freedom and the freedom of religious followers to practise their religions in prison, and also for the population of the ethnic minorities in remote areas.

Thank you for your attention. We'll be very happy to answer your questions.

Mr. Minh Tam Truong (As an Individual) (Interpretation): I would like to explain to all of you, and I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to make the presentation to you today. My name is Minh Tam Truong. I'm a member of the movement for the Vietnam Path, which is a civic organization fighting for human rights in Vietnam. This movement was created by Mr. Tran Huynh Duy Thuc and a number of other progressive intellectuals in Vietnam.

In my presentation today I would like to talk about the conditions in prisons in Vietnam. Because of the limited time, I will talk only about the conditions concerning political prisoners in Vietnam. This information and the facts that I'm going to present to you today are based on the experience of my one-year stay in prison after being accused of activities against the government. I have continued to collect those activities for a year since my release.

Ladies and gentlemen, the prison conditions in Vietnam, especially for political prisoners, are really very acute and very serious. Even though the law says there is no distinction between regular prisoners and political prisoners, in reality there is a lot of difference. Political prisoners are detained in an isolation cell nicknamed the tiger cage. This is a very small cell 4.7 square metres in size. There is no ventilation, no lighting. There is no clean water, no drinking water. Prisoners are not allowed to take a bath. They can be given only 1.2 to 10 litres of water every day. That's why they are living in very unhygienic conditions. It is very hot in summer and very cold in winter. It is called the tiger cage because in the summer it is very hot so all the prisoners are completely naked.

They always put the political prisoners and the criminal prisoners in one cell so that the criminal prisoners can exercise control over the political prisoners. The criminal prisoners always try to attack the political prisoners. That is considered a kind of indirect torture on their part.

● (1340)

The meal ration is very poor. Even though in theory they are allowed to have 1.2 kilograms of rice every day and 1.5 kilograms of meat or fish every month, the quality is very poor. For instance rice is usually either half cooked or burnt or mixed with grains of stone. The vegetables are all mixed up with garbage, roots, and soil. The fish are served cooked whole, no skinning, no removing the intestines. Meat consists mostly of either fat or bone and it is often rotten.

In these very poor and very unhygienic conditions most of the prisoners have contracted very serious illnesses like scabies, digestive illness, illness of the joints and bones, and deterioration of eyesight.

Those are the physical living conditions but the psychological conditions are equally tragic. They are only allowed to read the daily newspaper, *People's Army Newspaper*, which is an official organ of the Vietnamese Communist Party. They are forced to watch the TV program, which is meaningless or stupid, prepared by the government. They are not allowed to read or to receive any other newspapers or books sent by family.

In this respect I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the prisoners who are of Christian religions are discriminated against

even more. They cannot practise their religious ceremonies inside the prison and they are not allowed to read Bibles or any religious material. That is the reason there have recently been a lot of hunger strikes in the prison in Vietnam. That is the means of last resort, because they have no other means of drawing the attention of the world to their protest, so they offer their own body and their own well-being as a means of protest.

● (1345)

The Communist government makes their lives and the lives of their families even more difficult by transferring them to detention camps far away from their family home. They also continue to allow the criminal prisoners to beat up the political prisoners.

I would like to mention the names of a few political prisoners who have been undergoing hunger strikes for a long time: Mr. Dang Xuan Dieu, Mr. Dinh Nguyen Kha, Mr. Tran Vu Anh Binh, Mr. Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung, Ms. Bui Thi Minh Hang, Ms. Ta Phong Tan, Ms. Can Thi Theu, Ms. Nguyen Dang Minh Man, and Mr. Le Thanh Tung.

In particular, in this presentation to you, I would like to mention the names of three people.

A particular case of a person who suffers a lot of torture and maltreatment is that of Mr. Dang Xuan Dieu. When I was in prison, Mr. Dieu was in the cell next to me, so what I'm telling you now is precise and accurate information. He's a young man of the Catholic religion. He and Mr. Ho Duc Hoa are the two who have been given the longest sentence, which is 13 years.

He has been in prison for nearly four years. During these four years, the time in which he went on hunger strikes or refused to take food has amounted to more than 500 days. For six consecutive months, he was beaten by the criminal prisoners with the approval of the prison camp. He has many diseases involving the joints and the digestive system. He weighs just more than 40 kilograms, and his back is always bent over. He continues his hunger strike and his refusal to take meals as a protest against the government because, in his view, he considers that he has been treated with very grave injustice on the part of the government.

● (1350)

When I got out of prison I also let the outside community know about that and because of that Mr. Dieu has been transferred from the prison in Thanh Hoa to the camp in Xuan Loc. Despite the fact that the treatment has lightened up a bit, the severity hasn't changed very much.

I would appeal to you for humanitarian reasons to demand that Mr. Dieu be treated for his illness. He must have access to a lawyer to defend his case.

The next two cases are Mr. Tran Huynh Duy Thuc and Ms. Ta Phong Tan. I would like to ask for your help particularly for Ms. Ta Phong Tan because she's a woman and she is in a desperate situation and she has been in prison for a long time. We must pressure the communist government to treat people humanely no matter who that person is.

In the case of Mr. Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, we believe that he's completely innocent. He's a patriot and he's an intellectual and he needs to have his freedom so that he can contribute to the improvement of the country.

I am Truong Minh Tam. I'm a member of the organizations to protect human rights and I would like to work with you to improve and to protect human rights in Vietnam.

I thank you for your attention and I am prepared to answer your questions.

• (1355)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): I want to thank you for a very comprehensive testimony, but it has used up almost all our time.

We probably have enough time for two-minute questions, one from each party. That'll take us a little past our normal time of adjournment.

Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

What's particularly troubling—and I don't think it's come up in any of our meetings now on Vietnam—is that they are not only a member state of the United Nations, but they're a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council. They made a number of voluntary commitments, none of which have been fulfilled. The testimony here on the egregious human rights violations by this government has been consistent.

Pastor Nguyen, you said that you sent protest letters to the government with regard to some pending legislation. I take it that this legislation is just going to solidify the government's ability to persecute people who don't fall in line.

How did they respond to your written protests?

Mr. Hung Nguyen (Interpretation): As I said, we sent a letter of protest to the government. As usual—it is always the case—we received no response at all from the government.

This is not unusual. Even in 2013, when they circulated the request for feedback from people on the constitutional amendment, there were many opinions expressed. They gave no response and there was no action. That has always been the practice of the Vietnamese government.

• (1400)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Mr. Benskin, please.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you for your presence here today. I want to commend your courage as well as your compatriots', in the diaspora and at home in Vietnam, for your continued work towards human rights changes.

I want to add my voice to my colleague Mr. Sweet's in regard to my concern that Vietnam is a member state of the United Nations, yet is not adhering to the promises they've put forward.

Both of you have come here out of great risk to your own persons. I would like to ask you, for the record, if you are concerned about

reprisals when you return home to Vietnam, and what protections, if any, you have upon that return.

Mr. Minh Tam Truong (Interpretation): Speaking from my personal experience, it is our wish to work for the improvement of human rights conditions in Vietnam. That is the main aim. It has more weight than our own personal safety.

It's not true that we are not afraid, but we are willing to take the risk. We are sure that when we get back we will be subjected to harassment, but we hope that your influence and your support may provide some degree of a guarantee of safety for us.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Okay, Mr. Cotler has the last question. Just beforehand, I want to note that Hoang Mai was with us today. He didn't get a chance to ask a question. He's not a sitting member of the committee; he was just dropping in.

Go ahead, Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Yes, I just want to echo Mr. Sweet's previous comments. I regard it as scandalous really that Vietnam can continue to be a member of the UN Human Rights Council and sit in judgment of matters of human rights while enjoying a form of exculpatory immunity, if not being rewarded, by being able to sit on that council. That is something we should be taking up.

I just have very quick questions for Ms. Nguyen. I take to heart what you said regarding the taking of the prisoners of conscience. Because of time constraints, I have two quick questions.

One, do you have any comments about gender-based violence or violations of women's rights in Vietnam?

The second is that at this point there are serious restrictions on freedom of expression. Vietnam is ranked 174 out 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' freedom of expression index. My question is this. Do you find there is increasing attention being paid to bloggers and people on the Internet rather than controlling freedom of expression in the traditional media?

• (1405)

Ms. Trinh Nguyen: Thank you, Mr. Cotler.

To your first question regarding gender-based violence, I want to particularly mention the cases of female activists, female human rights defenders. Certainly they are in much more harm when they are in prison. The violence perpetrated against them is, if not more severe than with men, just as much. They are beaten. They are held in isolation, but then they are also beaten by more of the criminal prisoners. They don't have access to hygiene products when they are in prison. We have documented cases like that.

I think you asked more in general terms about gender-based violence. Is that correct, or did you mean more specifically human rights defenders?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I meant both.

Ms. Trinh Nguyen: I myself have a background in gender-based violence in Vietnam. I mean, like most countries, there are certainly not the sophisticated mechanisms for those who are experiencing violence to seek redress. Certainly that's always been an issue. I know there are a lot of civil society organizations and women's organizations that are always speaking up for those rights. But certainly there's no sophisticated mechanism for those who are seeking redress against their abusers.

To your question about whether or not there's much more focus on bloggers, you're absolutely correct. There is no sophisticated mechanism to control the Internet. The Vietnamese government has tried to block Facebook in the past, but as of today Vietnamese officials are even on Facebook and using it for their own propaganda. So instead they rely on offline tactics such as surveilling bloggers, arresting them, charging them with arbitrary charges, and keeping them in jail. This is a daily existence for the bloggers. The more that happens, the more they are empowered and compelled to speak out even more.

But certainly to that point, the Internet surveillance is not as sophisticated as China's, so the Vietnamese government relies much more on tactics of violence than anything else.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): I want to thank our guests for their testimony.

Mr. David Sweet: There are a few more minutes. We have about seven minutes. I'd certainly be happy if we could try to get two more members at two minutes each.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Sure, if you think we can.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for your time and your presentations.

The ongoing harassment, arbitrary detention, and imprisonment of human rights defenders illustrate Vietnam's failure to live up to its repeated pledges to protect human rights. Last year, for instance, Vietnam detained or imprisoned at least 11 bloggers and human rights defenders, and it currently holds about 200 political prisoners, the largest number in Southeast Asia.

Is more international pressure on Hanoi needed to ensure that arbitrary arrests and imprisonment stop and that all political prisoners, including human rights defenders, are released? In your opinion is the Vietnamese government likely to cave to international pressure?

Mr. Minh Tam Truong (Interpretation): Thank you for your question and your concern. The fact that I am here today to do the presentation to you does express the international concern about and attention to the situation in Vietnam. I think it is effective, basically, in the sense that since I came out of prison, for instance, and I presented the dire conditions of Mr. Dang Xuan Dieu, his conditions have changed a bit. So in fact there is change and it is effective, but I think we need to do more.

• (1410)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Mr. Mai.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): I'd like to thank the members of the committee for giving me the chance to ask questions.

[Member speaks in Vietnamese]

One of the main things that are important for us after this is to make sure that when you return to Vietnam you will be safe, so hopefully we can work together in order to make sure that you do not experience reprisals that will be harmful.

My question is to Ms. Nguyen. Regarding the fact that Canada can and has to do more to help human rights in Vietnam, can you tell us about the importance of maybe talking about human rights while we're negotiating the TPP?

Ms. Trinh Nguyen: Certainly, and I also want to add a note to what you said about what will happen when these individuals return home. I think one of the more concrete things a lot of members of Parliament can do, since we have their itinerary, is to send a message to the Canadian embassy saying these individuals are arriving on this date and asking them to make sure that they are not detained and that their passports are not confiscated. I think the embassy should send a human rights officer to the airport. In the past we've worked with the United States government to do this, and doing this has ensured their safety.

To your second point about what more can be done, I think that interestingly enough the Vietnamese government wants to be part of the global community. It wants to play by global rules. I think for that, you can set specific human rights benchmarks when you're talking trade. It doesn't have to be the grand gesture of legal reform. Certainly we want legal reform, but it's very hard to press on that. I think asking for prisoner release is something that they're amenable to and they're very susceptible to. I think that when world leaders come together and there's a significant enough voice, they want to save face, they want to be able to give....

These cases are winnable and we've seen that in the past. There just have to be more voices. There are certainly a number of cases for which, if we press hard enough and if there are enough MPs, the Vietnamese government is willing to give up in order to, say, jump on the TPP.

Apart from the TPP, there are instances of the ministry of foreign affairs meeting with their counterparts in Vietnam and talking about even smaller trade or defence agreements. Mentioning these cases makes a huge impact, because then the officials will talk to each other and say the Canadian government actually pays attention, so maybe we should reconsider case X or case Y, or maybe we should consider moving them to a better prison or consider getting them legal counsel.

I think those are the small steps you can take along with, of course, pressing for overall legal reform, changes to the constitution, and more freedom of expression. But if you offered them smaller cases, I think they'd be willing to bite on those.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Thank you for the testimony, and I'm sure our friends from the government side here

have been listening very carefully to your closing remarks. Thank you for the courage to be here. It's significant for people who stand up for the people who are marginalized in their own country like this to come before us.

With that, friends, the meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>