

## Vietnam and The Victims of Communism

On Tuesday, June 12, President Bush spoke at the dedication of The Victims of Communism Memorial that honors the memories of those killed in communist regimes.

He stated that their deaths should remind the American public "evil is real and must be confronted." Ironically, on Friday the 22, President Bush will honor the President of a tyrannical communist regime that murdered over a million Vietnamese and ethnic minorities with a White House visit during which he has the opportunity to confront that evil.

Recently, dozens of democracy activists, journalists, cyber-dissidents and Christian and other religious leaders were arrested and imprisoned by the Vietnamese communists.

Congressional leaders and human rights groups have charged Hanoi with "unbridled human rights abuses," and that it is the "worst wave of oppression in 20 years." Those recently arrested are but a few of the hundreds of political and religious prisoners in Vietnam; some have been tried, while those less visible are simply "disappeared". **This mounting crackdown is a deliberate diplomatic slap in the face of the United States.**

Hanoi was so brazen as to show on TV the kangaroo court trial of Father Ly who was muzzled during the proceedings. "In Vietnamese the colloquial phrase for censorship is *bit mieng* --to cover the mouth. The picture of Father Ly's muzzling seems a literal enactment of an old cliché." Denied representation, Father Ly was sentenced to eight years imprisonment.

One might wonder who is advising President Bush on Vietnam for he has made some diplomatic gaffs in dealing with the Vietnamese communists. President Bush's endorsement for Hanoi's admission into WTO at APEC in Hanoi, the removal of Vietnam from listed as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), and the granting of Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) were all predicated on the Communist Party substantially improving its human-rights record. "The widely published photo of President Bush smiling amicably under the bust of Ho Chi Minh augured terribly bad *feng shui* for Vietnam's human rights activists." In the mind of the Vietnamese these events validated that the leadership role of the communist party had been recognized. It should come as no surprise that after the granting of these privileges, the Vietnamese communists reverted back to form and continued and intensified their repression, for the Vietnamese communists have a litany of broken promises to the United States.

Although Vietnam professes great strides in religious freedom, one must look under the veneer to seek the truth. For example, in 2006, the Vietnamese government claimed that "25 denominations" had received certificates to carry on religious activities, when in fact they were only individual house churches. The price of these certificates is to surrender religious freedom. The church must submit to the central Bureau of Religious Affairs (CBA) a list of the names and addresses of members, and only those approved by the CBA can attend services. All sermons have to be submitted to the CBA for approval, and all sermons, including those of minorities, have to be given in Vietnamese. Pastors and priests can neither deviate from the approved sermon nor proselytize, and the CBA police monitor all services. Montagnards, Hmong and other Christians, Khmer Krom Monks, members of the Cao Dai faith, and Hoa Hao are still relentlessly persecuted. This is what Hanoi calls religious freedom, and the U.S. administration was naïve enough to believe them and removed them from the Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) list of countries that suppress religious freedom.

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Recently, the Vietnamese communist regime demanded of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues the cancellation of scheduled films to be screened at the 22 May forum.

One film, "Hunted Like Animals", sponsored by the Hmong-Lao Human Rights Council depicted the genocide against the Hmong, and the other film depicted human rights abuses against the Khmer Krom by the Vietnamese communists. It should come as no surprise that the UN acquiesced to the demands of the repressive Hanoi regime.

Reminiscent of the days of slavery in the "Old South", Montagnards who flee from repression in the Central Highlands are hunted down like wild animals. Vietnam pays bounties to Cambodian police for every Montagnard they catch and turn over to them.

Vietnam considers refugees seeking asylum in another country to be in violation of its national security; punishable by imprisonment up to 15 years.

Recently, three Montagnards were arrested by Cambodian police and charged with "human trafficking" for the so-called crime of aiding other Montagnards to flee the repression in Vietnam; via the Montagnards' "underground railroad." The U.S. has been diligently working with communist Vietnam and Cambodia to crack down on human traffickers. Although Cambodia does little to stop the trafficking of children for prostitution, the communist regime is prosecuting these Montagnards on Vietnam's request in hopes it will the U.S. they are serious about trafficking. Vietnam pulls the strings of the marionette Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Hanoi maintains a contingent of 3,000 troops, a mixture of special forces and intelligence agents, with tanks and helicopters, in a huge compound 2½ kilometers outside Phnom Penh right next to Hun Sen's Tuol Krassaing fortress near Takhmau. They are there to ensure that Hanoi's puppet, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, doesn't stray far from Hanoi's policies.

Reports continue to emanate from behind the curtain of silence drawn around the Central Highlands of the torture and deaths of Montagnard Christians. During a February trip to Hanoi, Ellen Sauerbrey, assistant secretary of state for population, refugees and migration, stated at a press conference that the Vietnamese officials assured her that Montagnards can freely travel to the Embassy in Hanoi or the Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City to voice any grievances. She also said that Montagnards should stay in Vietnam and not seek asylum in Cambodia. Given the Vietnamese communists history of repression and broken promises, how can Sauerbrey be that naïve to believe that Montagnards suffering persecution would ever to be allowed through the phalanx of Vietnamese police that surround the American Embassy and Consulate?

As predicted, Hanoi has already announced the release of few token high-profile political prisoners in an attempt to smooth the way for the arrival of Vietnam's President Triet, and in hopes of placating President Bush, the State Department and Congress. Can this administration be that gullible to fall for yet another charade by the Vietnamese communists? President Bush, keeping faith in the spirit of The Victims of Communism Memorial that "evil is real and must be confronted," should demand of Vietnam's President the release of all of the hundreds of political prisoners including those recently arrested and the more than 350 Christian Montagnards that seem to have been forgotten by this administration.

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