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Vietnamese **BULLETIN** vietnamien
Vietnamese Canadian Federation Fédération vietnamienne du Canada

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FEDERATION NEWS

Annual Meeting of VCF Council of Presidents

The 2003 annual meeting of the VCF Council of Presidents was held November 9 as a teleconference at the Vietnamese Canadian Centre in Ottawa. In addition to the presidents of VCF chapters in Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary, Windsor, and Sherbrooke who called in for the event, Dr. Hanh V. Phung of Montreal, Mr. Tho T. Nguyen of Halifax, Mr. Loc V. Tran of Gatineau, and Ms. Danh Lam Nguyen of the National Capital Region were able to join in the meeting at the Centre. The purposes of this meeting were: (1) to receive a report from the Executive Committee on the achievements of the past year; (2) to discuss the plan of action for the coming years; and (3) to elect the Representative and Deputy Representative of the Council and the Internal Auditors for the 2003-2004 terms of office. The results of the elections are reflected in the new VCF Management Structure on this page.

DFAIT Minister responds to VCF's suggestions regarding the consultation

meetings on Vietnam

December 10, 2003

Mr. Danh T. Nguyen
President, Vietnamese Canadian Federation
249 Rochester Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 7M9

Dear Mr. Nguyen:

Thank you for your letter of March 4, 2003, regarding our Vietnam Conference and consultations held in February 2003. I regret the delay in replying to you.

I am pleased that the Vietnamese Canadian Federation was able to attend and contribute to the Department's Human Rights NGO Consultations in Ottawa, as well as the DFAIT-sponsored Vietnam Conference in Toronto.

While I know that members of your federation and departmental officials are in regular contact over issues of concern, the Vietnam Conference provided a unique occasion to gather together academics, NGOs, community representatives, and private and public sector officials. Through this one-day dialogue, experts on Vietnam from Canada and around the world were able to reflect on, and discuss, the particular challenges and obstacles that Vietnam faces on the road to economic development and good governance. We hope to continue this dialogue in the future, and we will take your suggestion regarding the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development under advisement.

I appreciate your including a copy of a PEN Canada document with your letter. The Government of Canada remains concerned

about the human rights situation in Vietnam. We take every opportunity to make our views known through the Vietnamese Embassy in Canada, the Canadian Embassy in Vietnam, as well as through other suitable channels such as the United Nations.

In recent meetings, my colleague the Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific), the Honourable David Kilgour, raised the issue of human rights and religious discrimination with senior Vietnamese officials, including Vietnam's Ambassador to Canada. Our ambassador to Vietnam, Mr. Richard Lecoq, also raised Canada's concerns with Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong.

Canada firmly believes that a policy of engagement and constructive dialogue is the most effective way to improve human rights and citizen freedoms in Vietnam. This dialogue must take place not only between governments, but also directly between Canadian and Vietnamese citizens. I encourage you, in your capacity as President of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, which represents roughly 250,000 Vietnamese-Canadians, to continue participating in this constructive dialogue.

Department officials have been particularly active in this respect over the past few months, meeting with Vietnamese-Canadian youth across the country. In addition to seeking their views and answering questions about the current situation in Vietnam, they have encouraged greater engagement from Vietnamese-Canadian youth, such as their participation in the February conference or through internships in Vietnam. Through greater exchanges of people and the ideas, values and culture they impart, I am convinced that the human rights situation in Vietnam will show steady positive improvement.

I hope that your federation will continue to work closely with department officials for the betterment of Canada-Vietnam relations. Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

Bill Graham

Meeting at DFAIT and the Senate on Persecution of Buddhist Leaders in Vietnam

On November 3rd, 2003, Danh T. Nguyen, VCF's President, and Diep V. Trinh, Executive Director, accompanied a Buddhist delegation from Texas, Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa to visit Secretary of State David Kilgour (Asia Pacific), Senator Mac Harb, and DFAIT officials about the persecution of religious leaders by Vietnamese authorities. Following is a letter from Mr. Kilgour on this visit.

December 2003

The Venerable Thich Thien Tarn
President, Unified Vietnamese Buddhist
Church (Canada)
11328 97th Street
Edmonton, AB T56 1X4

This letter follows up on a meeting I had with members of the Vietnamese Buddhist Church and the Vietnamese Canadian Federation on November 3rd. At that time, the delegation brought forward its serious concerns regarding the status of the Very Venerable Thich Huyen Quang and the Very Venerable Thich Quang Do. I committed during our meeting to pursue this matter in further detail.

Last week, officials from the Canadian Embassy raised our concerns in this regard

with members of the Vietnamese government on two separate occasions. First, officials from our Embassy met with Vietnamese government officials in Hanoi on Friday, November 28th. On Saturday, November 29th, Canada's Ambassador to Vietnam, His Excellency Richard Lecoq also inquired about the status of the monks with Vietnamese officials in Ho Chi Minh City, following the visit of Canada's Chief Justice, the Right Honourable Beverly McLachlin.

Despite these two attempts to obtain information on the part of the Canadian Embassy in Vietnam, Canadian officials have not yet had an opportunity to verify personally the well-being of the two Very Venerable leaders of the UBCV. Please be assured that my office continues to work closely with Mr. Hai Ngo in pursuing this issue. Having worked with the Vietnamese community for many years, I am all too aware of the pressing nature of these matters and will update you as soon as we have more information.

Warmest regards,

David Kilgour

Lettre ouverte au Premier Ministre Jean Chrétien

Ottawa le Jeudi 30 Octobre 2003

Monsieur le Premier Ministre du Canada,

Depuis quelque temps déjà, les autorités vietnamiennes ont renforcé leur contrôle et intensifié les menaces contre la liberté des différents représentants religieux au Vietnam.

Il y a trois semaines, des policiers

vietnamiens ont empêchés plusieurs dirigeants de l'Eglise Bouddhique Unifiée de se rendre à Ho-Chi-Minh Ville en leur faisant barrage et en les soumettant à d'innombrables formalités, puis en crevant les pneus de leurs véhicules.

Cette semaine, ces vénérables ont été arrêtés sans motif et surtout tenus dans un endroit secret. Parmi eux se trouvent notamment le Vénérable Thich Quang Do âgé de 75 ans et Thich Huyen Quang âgé de 86 ans. Le Vénérable Thich Thien Hanh de la ville de Huê a été également mis en état de surveillance étroite et ce dernier a dû commencer une grève de faim pour protester contre cette pratique des autorités locales.

Nous, un petit groupe de pratiquants bouddhistes sensibles à l'injustice sociale, vous demande, Monsieur Jean Chrétien, de bien vouloir intervenir de toute urgence auprès de vos homologues vietnamiens pour que tous ces responsables religieux soient immédiatement libérés et qu'il soit possible pour eux de circuler librement.

Comptant sur votre soutien envers la défense des Droits de l'Homme dans ce pays, nous vous assurons, Monsieur le Premier Ministre, de nos salutations les plus sincères et les plus dévouées.

Les membres du groupe de pratique bouddhiste du Dimanche à la Pagode Tu-An (Ottawa)

Vietnam: l' arrestation des leaders bouddhistes doit être la goutte qui fait déborder la vase de la patience de l'Union européenne

Bruxelles, le 10 octobre 2003. Le Vén. Thich Huyen Quang, patriarche de l'Eglise Bouddhique Unifiée, le Vén. Thich Quang

Do et d'autres hauts dignitaires de l'EBUV ont fait l'objet au cours de ces dernières 48 heures de pressions de toutes sortes et finalement d'une arrestation suite à laquelle le Patriarche a été ramené manu militari à la Pagode Nguyen Thieu de la province de Binh Dinh tandis que Thich Quang Do, le numéro 2 de l'EBUV était emmené à Ho Chi Minh Ville, tous les deux étant accusés d'avoir été " trouvés en possession de documents secrets ".

Déclaration d'Olivier Dupuis, député européen, radical

"En l'espace de 48 heures le régime de Hanoi a, à nouveau, démontré sa vraie nature et de son incapacité totale à se démocratiser. Dans un premier temps des membres des services de sécurité assistés de voyous à la solde du régime ont bloqué pendant près de 10 heures et sous un soleil torride, le Vén. Thich Huyen Quang (86 ans), le Vén. Thich Quang Do (75 ans) et d'autres hauts dignitaires de l'Eglise Bouddhiste Unifiée. Seule l'intervention pacifique de centaines de moines et de citoyens a obligé le régime à les laisser poursuivre leur route. Quelques heures plus tard ils ont été à nouveau arrêtés et détenus pendant quatre heures avant d'être séparés, le Vén. Thich Huyen Quang étant ramené dans la Pagode de Nguyen Thieu et le Vén. Thich Quang Do à Ho Chi Minh Ville. Non contents, les autorités vietnamiennes les accusent de détention de secrets d'Etat.

Ce comportement de Hanoi vient, une fois encore, contredire les grandes déclarations des autorités vietnamiennes en faveur des réformes et de la démocratie qu'elles ont coutumes de faire aux gouvernements des pays européens et aux institutions de l'UE, qui financent à tour de bras d'ambitieux programmes de réformes * qui ne sont - ces

arrestations en sont la énième preuve - jamais réalisés ! Cette situation ne peut plus durer. L'UE et ses pays membres doivent à leurs citoyens et à leurs contribuables de mettre un terme à toute forme de complaisance avec un régime dictatorial tant que celui-ci ne fera pas la preuve de sa volonté d'entamer un réel processus de démocratisation, à travers la mise en oeuvre de réformes concrètes - à commencer par celle garantissant une complète liberté de religion. "

Olivier Dupuis,
Membre du Parlement Européen

MEDIA REVIEW

News from Australia: Hanoi's TV Program was cancelled

On October 6, 2003, SBS, one of the public TV channels in Australia, decided to broadcast *Thoi Su*, a "Current Affairs" program provided by government-run Vietnam Television as part of its WorldWatch foreign-produced news bulletins. However, the Vietnamese community in Australia overwhelmingly opposed this move since the community considered this program a propaganda tool used by the Hanoi government to provide biased information on Vietnam. After a relentless two-month campaign mounted by the Vietnamese Australian Community, with strong support from the Vietnamese communities around the world, on December 10, SBS decided to cancel *Thoi Su*. Although officially it has only been suspended, SBS says that it is unlikely that it will return.

Following are some media reports on this episode.

An insult to our original boat people

Greg Sheridan, Foreign Editor
The Australian
Thursday, November 6, 2003

SBS outrageously broadcasts Vietnamese communist propaganda -- at taxpayers' expense THE first journalistic trips I ever took to South-East Asia were following the trail of the Vietnamese refugees.

You may recall that when the communists took control of south Vietnam in 1975 they instituted a regime so barbarous and cruel that 1 1/2 million Vietnamese fled. These became known as the boat people. Countless thousands -- we will never know how many - - died at sea. The overwhelming majority were genuine refugees and were accepted as such by resettlement countries such as Australia, Canada, France and the US.

The pure evil that was communism has slipped too quickly from the public mind. The tens of millions killed by Stalin, Mao and yes indeed by Ho Chi Minh too somehow or other have disappeared from public debate. Some 200,000 Australians -- 1 per cent of our population -- are Vietnamese-born or have Vietnamese parents.

One per cent of our population -- you'd think they'd be entitled to some consideration, wouldn't you? They're not going to get that from SBS, it seems, which is using your tax money to broadcast the propaganda of the Vietnamese Communist Party as part of its regular daily news. It is airing each day the news program of VTV4, which is owned and controlled by the Vietnamese communists. VTV's website says that it exists to "provide news and propaganda" to "serve the party and the Government".

Trung Doan, the president of the Vietnamese community in Australia, aptly compares the broadcast to a holocaust-denial program broadcast daily in Hebrew on a TV channel ostensibly serving Jews. It is grotesquely contemptuous of the Vietnamese-Australian community and insulting to the memories of the 500 Australian soldiers who died trying to secure freedom for south Vietnam. More than that, it is an insult to every Australian who values democracy and freedom. How could it be that we pay taxes in this country to subsidise the broadcast of Stalinist propaganda from one of the most unfree and repressive regimes in the world?

The committee Reporters Without Borders ranks Vietnam 159th out of 166 countries in terms of press freedom. Arrests of Buddhist and Catholic religious figures are common. Vietnam is less Stalinist than it used to be -- after all, it's embraced a modest degree of market reform -- but it's still one of the most Stalinist societies on Earth.

The overwhelming majority of Vietnamese Australians came as refugees or relatives of refugees. Many had been through simply unbelievable torment and persecution. A colleague, Nicolas Rothwell, and I conceived the idea in the mid-1980s of writing a book about the re-education camps that the communist authorities set up after their victory in 1975.

Perhaps a million Vietnamese passed through these camps. They were not death-camps as such but countless thousands died in them from brutal mistreatment and malnutrition. The book lapsed, but between Australia, South-East Asia and the U.S., I must have interviewed hundreds of Vietnamese refugees over the years. Their experiences were truly mind-boggling and, although the details differed, they told me

essentially the same story.

I remember meeting one gentleman, Nguyen Dinh Qui, at the Palau Bidong refugee camp in Malaysia in the late '80s. He had been a Colombo Plan engineering student in Australia who had gone back to Vietnam in 1972. Modestly leftish in his politics, though offered the chance to leave south Vietnam in 1975 he decided to stay to try to build a new and better country. But the communist authorities threw him into a re-education camp because he had been politically "polluted" by his years in Australia. This destroyed his modest savings and property. After he got out of the camp the authorities decided to expel ethnic Chinese. His wife was ethnic Chinese so Nguyen and his family tried to leave. But after paying the state authorities all the relevant bribes they were still arrested while trying to escape. In that episode their two small children, a boy and a girl, both drowned. Can you imagine what that does to someone? Thank God eventually they escaped to the freedom of Australia.

How is it now that they, and everyone else, now pay taxes to subsidise the broadcast of Stalinist propaganda produced by their persecutors? If anything is obscene, this surely is.

The cultural Left, the types who run organisations such as SBS, have never had much time for Vietnamese refugees because they are anti-communist. They didn't fit the neat, simplistic formulas that hold that all victimhood in this world is caused by Western colonialism.

When Saigon fell in 1975 the icon of such people, then prime minister Gough Whitlam, said to Clyde Cameron, among others, that he would not take in substantial numbers of

Vietnamese refugees because "I will not have those f----- yellow Balts with their religious and political prejudices against us".

Few people ever stand up for Vietnamese Australians. Though successful, they are in many ways a forgotten minority.

Nigel Milan, the managing director of SBS, told the Senate Estimates Committee this week that the Vietnamese community, 5,000 of whom, according to Sydney's Daily Telegraph, demonstrated outside the SBS offices against the communist broadcasts, was engaged in "an organised campaign against freedom of speech and freedom of expression" which he found "deeply troubling". To campaign against the taxpayer-funded broadcasts of Stalinist propaganda is not to curtail freedom of speech. Milan's contemptible comments add insult to injury. SBS is a disgrace.

Greg Sheridan's book, *Cities of the Hot Zone*, a Southeast Asian adventure, is published by Allen and Unwin.

This is News? Australia funds Vietnamese propaganda

Far Eastern Economic Review
November 27, 2003

VIETNAM HAS changed in many ways since thousands of Vietnamese were forced to flee as "boat people" at considerable risk to their lives. But when it comes to ideas, Hanoi's communists continue to insist that there are unacceptable thoughts, and those who hold them still find themselves in peril.

This year, authorities sentenced Pham Hong Son to 13 years in jail (now reduced to five years) for what the European Union characterized as apparently "a mere exercise

of freedom of expression." Hanoi thus will be chuffed to find an ally in the Australian government-funded Special Broadcasting Service, which has taken to screening propaganda from Vietnam.

Beginning in October, SBS--whose mandate is to be a "multicultural" broadcaster--has been showing news bulletins six days a week from VTV4, the overseas Vietnamese channel of Vietnam Television. The screening is part of SBS's WorldWatch television programme, a politically correct offering of news bulletins from 19 countries. There is no doubt about the nature of VTV4's content.

Vietnam Television's Web site candidly says the organization is a "governmental institution assigned with the function of disseminating information regarding policies adopted by the party and government . . ." After 5,000 Vietnamese-Australians protested against the affront in Sydney, the head of SBS was summoned to Canberra to explain the broadcaster's decision to air the bulletin. Asked how many of the messages SBS had received about the programme were negative, Nigel Milan reportedly said: "In the order of . . . 90%." Yet he was unswayed by all the reaction: "I am still to be convinced that the majority of people in the Vietnamese community do not want this service."

Apparently, he knows better than the 200,000-strong community--many of whom ended up in Australia precisely because it represents the opposite of everything they abhorred and feared about communist Vietnam. And in an amazing turn, Mr. Milan accused Vietnamese-Australians of "an organized campaign against freedom of speech and freedom of expression," adding that "I find it deeply troubling."

As one ethnic-minority observer in Sydney put it to us: "It's just another example of hypocrisy. The ostensible purpose of SBS is to cater towards the needs of Australia's ethnic minorities. The only problem is that in its current form, it's run more to suit what the Left believes should be the needs of those minorities." We wonder what Pham Hong Son would think. Too bad VTV4 isn't likely to air his views. What about his freedom of expression?

Behind the Vietnamese siege of SBS

Christopher Kremmer
with Misha Ketchell
Sydney Morning Herald, December 20, 2003

News from home is not always welcome, as SBS Television found when it was forced pull a program.

It crouches amid wheelie bins and racist graffiti in a grubby lane in Sydney's western suburbs, the unlikely command centre for the Australian front of a distant war that never really ended.

The framed chunk of masonry that decorates the surgery of Dr Tien Nguyen is from the Berlin Wall. But as the caption suggests, the message is intended for the land of his birth. "The Communist regime in Vietnam will surely collapse soon," it reads.

They have been waiting for 30 years. But the president of the NSW branch of the Vietnamese Community in Australia (VCA) and his federal counterpart, Melbourne-based Trung Doan, recently celebrated a rare victory: the successful campaign to block the broadcast of news from Vietnam by SBS Television.

It was bad news, literally, as far as they and tens of thousands of others who rallied nationwide in the cause were concerned; propaganda produced by a communist state. To its supporters, however, *Thoi Su* ("Current Affairs") - provided free of charge by Vietnam Television - was a refreshing and reasonably sober alternative to Australian Vietnamese media outlets, which critics say are overwhelmingly and fanatically anti-Hanoi.

When SBS decided to begin broadcasting *Thoi Su* on October 6 as part of its WorldWatch line-up of foreign-produced news bulletins, they knew it would cause trouble. The new program was announced one day before it aired. A written undertaking to conduct prior consultation with the Vietnamese community was not honoured.

Suddenly, a community that normally reserves its most intense furies for internal struggles was galvanised by a collective insult. "They tried to ambush us, and we were very angry," recalls Nguyen, who served as a medic for the South Vietnamese military before his capture at An Loc, near the Cambodian border, in the final weeks of the Vietnam War in 1975. He spent three years in a communist labour camp before fleeing by boat to Australia in 1980.

Says Doan: "One criticism is that we were interfering with media freedom. But we were victims of a decision by SBS to exercise its editorial independence without a sense of editorial responsibility."

Admits Nigel Milan, SBS's managing director: "It was a cock-up . . . We had, through a previous manager, guaranteed further consultation, and then not honoured that undertaking."

The image that haunts Milan is of a Vietnamese woman standing outside his Sydney headquarters with a banner that read "SBS ARROGANT".

By then, the Vietnamese Community in Australia organisation had swung into overdrive. A series of national telephone conferences had formulated a strategy. They set up a website and reached out to the media and politicians on all sides.

On November 10, a message posted on the campaign website advised supporters to "Hit SBS's budget". The broadcaster's 1800 feedback number, it pointed out, "is free for consumers but SBS has to pay". The author said he had ordered his six family members to make five calls each per day. If the entire community did likewise, the author estimated, "SBS TV has to pay \$20,000, \$30,000 each day, and the money it pays each month increases to hundreds of thousands of dollars". Instructions on how to mask callers' phone numbers were included. On one night alone, the SBS operator reported receiving 23 successive calls from the same man.

The website funnelled at least 30,000 messages from angry viewers to SBS. One observant visitor to the website noticed that a large majority of people signing its online petition against *Thoi Su* were in the United States, home to 1.5 million Vietnamese, seven times more than in Australia.

"As far as my community is concerned, the Vietnamese American community is effectively the anchor community," Doan would later write to SBS board chairman Carla Zampatti.

Doan said the campaign was supported by the vast majority of the 170,000-plus

Vietnamese community in Australia, most of whom either fled Vietnam as boat people or had relatives who were persecuted.

In fact, he told *The Age* this week, it was the single biggest event in the 28-year history of the community in Australia. "I think the average Vietnamese Australian is like the average Aussie. They go about life and they're not particularly politically active. But this issue has galvanised them. Everyone is talking about it."

In its two months on air, *Thoi Su* attracted up to 28,000 viewers to its early morning slot on WorldWatch, which also broadcasts news programs from China, Russia, Poland, Indonesia and the Middle East.

But its opponents were winning the media war. Dismissing complaints to the Australian Broadcasting Authority as "a waste of time", they hit the airwaves and newspapers. Doan's picture byline beamed forth from newspaper columns, while Nguyen chatted regularly with Sydney radio jocks such as Alan Jones and Mike Carlton. Columnists such as Gerard Henderson, Andrew Bolt and Greg Sheridan provided support.

Tactical alliances against a common enemy were part of the media game plan. "Alan Jones hates SBS and criticises multiculturalism. It might be stupid, but I knew he could help us," Nguyen recalls.

SBS management in Sydney, on the other hand, was missing in action, avoiding comment because the issue was being considered by their community advisory committee and board.

On October 28, they noticed a large crowd gathering outside their plush Artarmon headquarters. A world away in Cabramatta,

the train station had been overwhelmed by thousands of protesters heading their way and ran out of tickets. In an early victory, the protesters were allowed to travel free. Two demonstrations outside SBS's Sydney headquarters and a third in Melbourne's Federation Square attracted a total of 20,000 people. The Vietnamese foot soldiers were on the move, to a drumbeat of outrage in the Vietnamese community press and radio. Catholic priests used their pulpits to back the campaign.

With elections not far off, VCA delegations were welcomed at the offices of at least 20 MPs, including Communications Minister Daryl Williams and Labor's spokesman Lindsay Tanner.

SBS TV's pleas that its editorial independence was being undermined were falling on deaf ears. Fronting a routine Senate estimates committee on November 3, Milan was savaged by both major parties. Victorian Labor senator Stephen Conroy asked if there were plans to broadcast North Korean news programs, too.

By comparing Hanoi to Pyongyang, Conroy, a former superannuation officer with the Transport Workers Union, displayed a finely tuned populism - but a less firm grasp of Australian foreign policy.

Unlike Washington, which slapped a 20-year freeze on relations with Hanoi after the war, Canberra has had cordial relations with Vietnam for 30 years. Our warships visit their ports and their communist officials welcome our investors and attend our human rights courses.

While acknowledging that the Vietnamese media remained restricted in their coverage of politics and dissent, the Department of

Foreign Affairs and Trade's latest report finds that "the civil and political rights situation in Vietnam has been gradually improving". Two-way trade, in which many Vietnamese-Australians are involved, is worth \$3 billion annually.

At Senate estimates, Milan told Conroy something else that seemed to shock him - that the VCA did not represent the views of the majority of the Vietnamese community. "Are you suggesting that this is like TV Week - one person is cutting out 10 coupons and sending them in? Is that what you think is happening?" Conroy asked. "Yes," Milan replied.

Some Vietnamese Australians who have spoken to *The Age* agree with Milan. "Outwardly, the community presents a facade of democracy, but internally, dissent is ruthlessly suppressed. Elections are controlled through community associations dominated by hardliners," says Hoang Tran, a fortyish professional who came to Australia as a refugee but now often visits Vietnam.

"People who travel to Vietnam are sometimes denounced as communists, and may have their businesses boycotted. But members of the VCA have it both ways - they denounce Hanoi, while their own families do business with it. It's just a big racket."

The trauma of survivors of violence was used as an argument against broadcasting the program. Doan says he presented the SBS board with testimony from experts on post-traumatic stress that outlined the impact of the news program on survivors of torture.

"We brought along a torture counsellor who talked about some case histories, people

whose symptoms had been worsened, not by viewing the program, but just by knowing the program was there," says Doan.

Zachary Steel, a lecturer in psychology at the University of NSW, was part of the most comprehensive study of trauma among Vietnamese refugees ever carried out in Australia. The study of 1200 refugees, published in *The Lancet* last year, portrayed an uncommonly tough people whose rates of mental illness are half those of the general community. But a minority who suffered multiple traumas during the war, as well as a more recent triggering event, was twice as likely as the rest of us to suffer severe mental illness. In other words, the damaged are very damaged.

"They struggle to avoid unhappy memories, but confronted by reminders of the past, they develop acute and intense emotional anguish and distress," Steel told *The Age*. "The mere knowledge that a certain program is on air, and is generating controversy, could quite easily trigger a severe reaction."

Loi Ngyuen, who lives on a disability pension in Sydney's west, is one such man. He spent eight years in a concentration camp. "I didn't watch *Thoi Su*, but just knowing about it made me think about the past, in the camps. Then, especially in the night time, I couldn't control my thoughts." He says he is still suffering nightmares triggered by the controversy.

But Loi is not the only Vietnamese Australian who is afraid. At least two *Thoi Su* supporters invited to the SBS community advisory committee meeting on the issue declined to attend, addressing it by telephone, for fear of being victimised. Those who did attend shunned interview requests from SBS Radio.

On December 10, in an unprecedented intervention on programming matters, the SBS board met and agreed unanimously to dump *Thoi Su*. Although technically the program has only been suspended, Milan says it is "unlikely" to return.

For some Vietnamese Australians that's a tragedy. "It was a rare example of diversity in the Vietnamese language media in Australia, a valuable window on what's going on in Vietnam today," says Hoang Tran, who will be looking for his news on the internet from now on.

The search for an alternative to *Thoi Su* ordered by the SBS board is on the backburner for now. Keen to let passions cool, Milan says they may get around to it in mid-2004.

The VCA says it is willing to arrange for SBS to rebroadcast a news program produced by Vietnamese exiles in the US free of charge, but SBS is cool on the idea. "We wouldn't want to get into a situation where we'd closed down one program after being accused of putting propaganda to air, and then put on a different form of propaganda," Milan says.

The **Vietnamese Bulletin vietnamien** is a quarterly newsletter published by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation.

The Federation welcomes contributions to this publication from its member associations and from the public, as well as suggestions or comments that may help improve its format or enrich its content.

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