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

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FEDERATION NEWS

**Canada and the Visit by the Dalai Lama:
Letter from the Minister of Foreign
Affairs to VCF President**

On the occasion of the visit to Canada by the Dalai Lama in April 2004, Danh Nguyen, President of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, urged the Minister of Foreign Affairs to meet with him to discuss human rights issues. Following is the response from the Minister.

June 25, 2004

Dear Mr. Nguyen:

Thank you for your letter of March 29, 2004, concerning the Dalai Lama's visit to Canada. I regret the delay in replying to you.

As you may know, the Prime Minister met privately with the Dalai Lama in Ottawa on April 23, 2004, in an unofficial capacity. The decision to meet with the Dalai Lama was based on his standing as a highly respected spiritual leader in the international community and as a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Prime Minister and the

Dalai Lama met in a spiritual setting, where they discussed human rights in general as well as the situation in Tibet, among other issues. The Dalai Lama also conveyed his views on the current global situation and the recent anti-Semitic incidents in Canada. The Government of Canada was not involved in preparations for the Dalai Lama's visit.

Canada encourages representatives of the Dalai Lama and People's Republic of China to continue their existing dialogue process, noting the 2002 and 2003 visits to China by the Dalai Lama's envoys as part of that process.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

Bill Graham

**All-Candidates Meeting at the
Vietnamese Canadian Centre: June 19,
2004**

About 70 people attended the all-candidates meeting hosted by the Vietnamese Canadian Centre at its location, 249 Rochester Street, Ottawa on Saturday June 19 to promote debate on issues of common interest in Election 2004. Of nine candidates registered with Elections Canada for the Ottawa Centre riding, eight accepted the invitation to participate, including: Ed Broadbent, NDP; David Chernushenko, Green Party; Carla Marie Dancey, Canadian Action Party, Robert Gauthier, Independent; Louis Lang, Marxist-Leninist; Richard Mahoney, Liberal; Mike Murphy, Conservative; and Stuart Ryan, Communist.

The debate was focused on three themes of special interest to the Vietnamese

community: Foreign Aid and Human Rights; Accreditation and Employment of Internationally Trained Professionals; and Employment Equity in the Public Service. To address these issues, the Vietnamese Canadian Centre prepared the following questions for reaction by the candidates:

1. Foreign Aid and Human Rights

Canada has been known as a generous country which actively participates in promoting democratic values and respect for human rights throughout the world. How would your party reconcile between providing development aid and the issue of respect for human rights in the receiving countries ?

2. Accreditation and Employment of Internationally Trained Professionals

Canada is a nation built by immigrants. It is well known that immigrants are essential to its economic growth and the well-being of its people. It is also well known that there is a general shortage of skilled workers, especially in the healthcare area. Yet, many immigrants find it difficult to use the professional training that they've obtained in their home countries in their search for employment in Canada. How would your party address this issue ?

3. Employment Equity in the Public Service

The issue of employment equity was raised at the national level ever since Judge Abella produced her report many years ago. What kind of progress has been made in the area of employment equity in the federal public service since then, especially with regard to visible minorities ? What is your party's position in this area ?

All candidates responded to these questions

in a concise and comprehensive way.

Following is a report entitled "Mahoney: Vote Liberal or Tory" by Nelly Elayoubi of the Ottawa Sunday Sun (June 20, 2004).

Ottawa Centre Liberal candidate Richard Mahoney says voters only have one choice to make: Do they make Paul Martin or Stephen Harper the next prime minister. During yesterday's all-candidates' debate, Mahoney said a vote for any other party is simply a waste.

But other Ottawa Centre candidates are urging voters to put an "X" next to the person they feel would make the best MP.

"It's better to vote for what you want and not get it, than to vote for what you don't want and get it," said Canadian Action Party candidate Carla Dancey, who ran in the last federal election under the Reform banner.

NDP candidate Ed Broadbent said Canadians should vote according to their values.

"They should think very seriously about what kind of Canada we want. In broad terms for me, it means a society grounded on the interconnected notion of liberty and equality."

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mahoney asked voters to think "very, very carefully" about the Canada they want, taking repeated shots at Tory rival Mike Murphy.

At the event, hosted by the Vietnamese Canadian Centre, candidates were grilled

on their views on issues such as foreign aid and human rights, accreditation of internationally trained professionals and employment equity in the public service.

"The Liberals do a lot of talking, the Conservatives can make it happen. That's a promise," Murphy said, adding the need for more doctors could be met through skilled immigrants.

Mahoney said it's up to the federal government to "knock the heads" of the province and the various accrediting bodies to get moving on accrediting foreign professionals.

"We have in our platform a commitment to fund and train and credit 1,000 new Canadians in the medical system alone," Mahoney said.

Broadbent called the accreditation issue "serious," saying he wants to see a commission set up to deliver a report on solutions within a year.

The former NDP leader also said he wants to see high-ranking public servants reflect the ethnic diversity of Canada.

Minister of State Augustine announces major project as Asian Heritage Month begins

Following is a press release issued by Canadian Heritage on the occasion of the visit by Jean Augustine, Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Status of Women) to the Vietnamese Canadian Centre May 4 to announce funding for VCF's activities.

OTTAWA, May 4, 2004 -- "Helping communities help themselves is an

important part of the Multiculturalism Program, and a project developed by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation (VCF) is an excellent example of how government and communities can work together in order to reach that goal," said the Honourable Jean Augustine, Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Status of Women), at an event in Ottawa, today.

Community Capacity Building for Moving Forward is a forward-looking, three-year project, developed by the VCF, that will receive funding through the Multiculturalism Program to address contemporary issues in Canada's Vietnamese community.

"In the last 30 years, many Vietnamese people have come to Canada and they have contributed greatly to Canada's social, cultural, and economic life," said Minister of State Augustine. "This May, as we celebrate Asian Heritage Month, I am eager to work with the Vietnamese Canadian Federation to ensure that Vietnamese Canadians will be able to continue to cherish their heritage and to prosper in Canada."

Community Capacity Building for Moving Forward will focus on improving the community's ability to efficiently deliver services. Among other things, the three-year project will involve building an electronic database on the evolution of the Vietnamese community and conducting a national study on the socio-economic integration of the Vietnamese community. It will also organize a national workshop on the opportunities and challenges facing the community, and design methods to develop VCF members' leadership skills, and to improve project planning, management and fundraising efforts.

The VCF was founded in 1980 to respond to

the needs of the expanding Vietnamese refugee community. Beginning with five member associations in Montréal, Sherbrooke, Ottawa-Gatineau, and Toronto, the VCF is now a nation-wide organization that has adapted to the needs of those early immigrants and refugees who are now retiring, and the new generation born in Canada.

Financial assistance of \$233,000 over a three-year period for the Moving Forward project is provided by the Multiculturalism Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

May is Asian Heritage Month in Canada. For many years, Asians in Canada and throughout North America have celebrated their heritage in May. After an inaugural event in Toronto in 1993, many cities across the country, including Halifax, Montréal, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver, developed their own celebrations. This culminated in a formal declaration in December 2001, when the Senate of Canada passed a motion officially designating May as Asian Heritage Month in Canada.

Canada's Multiculturalism Policy promotes the full and equitable participation in Canadian society by people of all origins and encourages interaction between communities of different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. It also encourages public institutions to be respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural character.

Funding for this initiative was provided for in the March 2004 federal Budget.

Information:

Fred Sherman, Press Secretary
Office of the Minister of State
(Multiculturalism and Status of Women)

(819) 997-9900

Canadian Ambassador to Vietnam visited Vietnamese communities in Canada

Following the initiative undertaken by former Canadian ambassador to Vietnam Cécile Latour, through the arrangements made by VCF, the current ambassador, Richard LeCoq, visited the Vietnamese communities in Montreal, Calgary, Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Ottawa in June 2004. The reports on some of these visits are given below.

La rencontre de l'Ambassadeur Richard LeCoq avec les délégués de la communauté vietnamienne à Montréal

Le 11 juin 2004

Nous avons reçu l'accord de l'Ambassadeur du Canada au Viet Nam, M. Richard LeCoq, pour une breakfast-rencontre avec notre Communauté, le Mardi 8 Juin 2004, de 9h30 à 10h30 à l'hôtel Ritz Carlton, Montréal.

Voici le déroulement : Mr l'ambassadeur est venu avec Mme Patricia Atkinson du ministère des affaires extérieures. Les délégués vietnamiens présents (ordre alphabétique) : Phung Van Hanh, Le Thanh Huong, Do Thi Kim, Phan Van Ninh, Ly Hong Sen, Vu Van Thai, Lam Chan Tho, Thai Cong Tung, Tu Uyen.

Après la présentation des participants Mr Phung, Président de la communauté prit la parole : ``Son Excellence l'Ambassadeur du Canada au Viet Nam. C'est un grand honneur et une grande joie pour nous de vous recevoir aujourd'hui dans une ambiance amicale et de confiance réciproque. *This meeting was materialized thanks to the Ambassador's goodwill and*

the eagerness of Mme Patrica Atkinson, Nadia Scipio del Campo, Dr. Le Duy Can, Me Lam Chan Tho and Dr. Tu Uyen. Many thanks to all of you. Nous avons tous le vif désir de nous nous rapprocher, nous nous comprendre, de concerter pour un but commun de faire valoir les valeurs canadiennes humanitaires et démocratiques. Je prends l'occasion pour vous remettre la mémoire dans laquelle nous confions à notre Ambassadeur bien-aimé nos intentions et attentes. Avant de laisser la parole aux autres délégués je souhaite la santé, le bonheur à vous et à votre adorable épouse, ainsi à tous nos invités aujourd'hui`` .

L'ambassadeur accepta la mémoire, répondit à notre bienvenue et promit de faire de son mieux pour réaliser nos attentes. Ensuite Dr Tu Uyen, a exposé le cas du Dr Nguyen Dan Que tombé dans l'oubli et l'isolement ces derniers temps. Il a aussi représenté le groupe ``democracy for Viet Nam`` du Dr Lam Thu Van pour remettre les revendications pour les droits de l'homme. Mme Le Thanh Huong, Président du comité superviseur a proposé des interventions pour améliorer le sort des orphelins, des enfants infirmes et démunis, pour l'efficacité des NGO etc.. Dr Ly Hong Sen, Président de l'Association des anciens combattants vietnamiens, a exposé plusieurs revendications dont l'une concernant la réparation de la cimetièrre de l'ARSVN à Bien Hoa détruite systématiquement par les communistes. La communauté vietnamienne d'outre-mer est prête à couvrir les frais dit-il. Mr Vu Van Thai représente les bouddhistes a parlé la persécution religieuse au Vietnam. Il mit l'ambassadeur en garde les mensonges des faux bonzes travaillés pour le parti communiste. Mme Do Thi Kim, représentante de l'association des Pharmaciens à Québec a parlé des abus du gouvernement de Hanoi dans le choix des étudiants vietnamiens boursiers envoyé dans

les Universités de Québec. Un autre délégué appuya cette constatation : Ce choix basé sur les performances scolaires individuelles, doit être confié à un comité des professeurs canadiens pour éviter le biais des connections avec les hauts dignitaires du parti communiste.

M. Phung transmet à l'ambassadeur les revendications de M. Dang Tan Hau (absent) sur les échanges commerciales entre Canada et Viet Nam: les livres, les cassettes de musique et de théâtre et les publications du régime communiste au Vietnam sont vendus librement au Canada. Mais en revanche, Viet Nam a confisqué tous les produits de culture cités en haut importés, provenant du diaspora vietnamien. Enfin M. Thai Cong Tung, un spécialiste de l'environnement a parlé les dégâts énormes causés par la déforestation, la pollution des eaux etc..Monsieur l'Ambassadeur a renforcé ses revendications en parlant de la pollution du Baie d'Halong qu'il a expérimenté lui même.

Bref la rencontre se déroulait dans un atmosphère presque familial où chacun souciait des dégâts spirituels, culturels, sociaux au Viet Nam .. cherchait des solutions pour améliorer la situation actuelle que seule la fin du régime communiste sera la solution optimale. Il faisait beau au dehors. Notre salle de réunion sous l'aile plastique du veranda était éblouissante de lumière, embaumée par les fleurs, rafraichie par la verdure du jardin adjacent, si pacifique qu'un moineau a deux fois essayé de percher sur le chandelier surplombant la longue et large table garnie de notre rutilant déjeuner. Notre Ambassadeur semblait connu de nous tous, depuis longtemps, tant il était si affable, compréhensif, sensible.

(Rapport rédigé par Dr. Phung Van Hanh, Président, Communauté vietnamienne de

Montréal)

Presentation to Ambassador Richard LeCoq in Calgary

Following is a letter presented to Ambassador LeCoq on his recent visit to the Vietnamese community in Calgary

June 14th, 2004

H.E. Mr. Richard Lecoq
Canadian Ambassador to Vietnam
31 Hung Vuong Ha Noi, Vietnam

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

We first want to bring you warm greetings and express our appreciation for your willingness to listen to our concerns about our fellow Mennonites in Vietnam.

As you may know the Mennonite Church is an international church with congregations in sixty-six countries on five continents. We can assure you that Mennonite people seek to do no harm. Documented evidence throughout our history in Russia, Mexico, Paraguay, Canada and other countries has shown that Mennonites who are free to practice their faith also bring improvements to social life, civil life and the economy. This evidence is widely available through various government archives and the internet. Many Vietnamese in Canada and in various parts of Vietnam have also embraced this faith.

Mennonite Christians have a deep religious faith and are committed to helping others in need regardless of religion or lack of religion. With this commitment, Mennonite communities and personnel from Canada, the United States and other countries have worked alongside the Vietnamese people for fifty years providing emergency assistance to

displaced persons, giving medical care, supporting educational programs and encouraging agricultural development and income generation. Much of the support was given during the time of the American war in the southern part of the country, but aid was also given to victims of war in the north. After 1975 our churches contributed to a significant development program throughout the country which is ongoing and well documented.

We have a great appreciation for Vietnam's policy of freedom of religion as guaranteed in Vietnam's Constitution. Many established religious communities are thriving. However, we also want to express serious concern about some incidents in which a number of Christians, and particularly the Mennonites, have been badly mistreated.

We recognize the Vietnamese government's need to maintain order in the central highlands. However, credible evidence indicates that Christian ethnic minority people in this area are suffering unwarranted harassment from the local authorities. Some of these harassed minority people are related to the Mennonite Church. On January 16, 2004, in the city of Kon Tum, the home of a Mennonite leader was destroyed for unknown reasons by the local security police, just weeks after it was built. (Please see attached reports.) Mennonite leaders in Vietnam have also informed us that some Mennonite Christians were among those killed, injured and missing in the aftermath of the government's harsh crackdown April 9 and 10 on the ethnic minorities who had planned peaceful demonstrations to call attention to loss of land and lack of religious freedom. We believe that ethnic minority Christians in the central highlands desire to live peacefully, to work and care adequately for their families, to practice their religious faith and to help strengthen the nation.

Recently on June 8 in Ho Chi Minh City a prominent church leader, Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang, was arrested for investigation on the charge of "inciting others to interfere with an officer doing his duty." During the past few years Rev. Quang has documented the arrest of religious leaders, the destruction of church buildings and the harassment of many local religious persons by security police. He once lived in the central highlands and has many friends there. In recent years many ethnic minority people have come to his home to tell their stories of abuse.

On March 2 four of Rev. Quang's associates were arrested and detained, and his own arrest on June 8 appears to stem from the same incident. Unknown persons were shadowing, following and on occasion threatening persons who came to see him. On March 2 some of Quang's associates jotted down the license number of the motorcycle of these men and photographed the vehicle to report this harassment to the precinct government. However, within a short time a large number of security officials appeared. Quang and several others were beaten. A church deacon was arrested and taken away. When they heard reports that this man was being beaten in police custody, three others went to the police station and were also arrested. Some were severely beaten. Three months later they have apparently not yet been formally charged, though some are accused of "resisting persons carrying out official duties." Officials claim these arrests have nothing to do with religion, but that these are only civil cases against those who criminally violate civil laws. (Please see attached reports for details.)

Besides these incidents, members of Mennonite churches in many other places have been harassed. Believers have been

stopped on the way to church, or interrogated after being there. Worship services have been interrupted and some churches are closely watched by the police. Pastors have been forbidden from traveling beyond their local areas. Especially at the Mennonite Church in Vinh Cuu, Dong Nai, the police have interrupted the services many times, threatening the believers and temporarily detaining the church leaders for interrogation. On Easter Sunday the pastor was summoned to the security police station for questioning for conducting “illegal” religious activity. Power supply to the church has been cut off. On Sunday May 2, 2004, the police surrounded the church and broke the glass door to enter the building while the believers were worshiping inside. The forced entry caused injury to a number of people. (Please see attached report for details.) Government officials repeatedly said that their actions had nothing to do with religion, while at the same time demanding that people sign statements that they will no longer meet at the Mennonite church.

We believe that religious freedom is an innate human right and a fundamental condition for a stable and progressive society. We would like to ask you, Mr. Ambassador, to present our concerns to the Vietnamese government by sending them our letter. We would appreciate your assistance in securing the release of Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang and other church leaders. We also seek the return of church property, such as documents and computers, confiscated when Pastor Quang was arrested. We request you assistance to do whatever you can so that the harassment of Mennonites would be stopped as soon as possible.

Respectfully Yours,

Dan Nighswander, General Secretary

Mennonite Church Canada

Henry Krause, Moderator
Mennonite Church Canada

Ambassador LeCoq's Feedback

After Ambassador LeCoq's return to his post in Hanoi, he wrote the following letter to Can D. Le, VCF's Commissioner for External Affairs.

Hanoi, July 1, 2004

Dear Can,

Finally back in the torrid health (over 35 degrees since I arrived, health index of 50 today!) of Hanoi, tired but still holding out!

I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful and pleasant dinner that my wife and I were offered with the Vietnamese Canadian community during our short stay in Ottawa. I also want you to know how much I appreciated everything you did so that I could meet and address the other communities across the country.

Whether in Ottawa, Montreal, Saskatoon, Calgary or Vancouver, the meetings were, in my view, most useful and productive as they gave me the opportunity to continue a dialogue with Canadians of Vietnamese origin who remain interested in Vietnam. Many points came out of the discussions, which were always open and direct, and it was certainly useful for me to hear the concerns and preoccupations of the young and older generation alike.

I will read with interest the many documents that I was given and distribute them accordingly at the Embassy for reference or any necessary follow-up.

In conclusion, just two practical points I would like to bring to your attention:

Many in the Vietnamese community asked me about sending charity funds to Vietnam and making sure that the money will be directed to the Vietnamese people. Two recognised Canadian NGOs that I approached since my return expressed an initial interest in collecting and managing these funds but wanted to look at it further. We intend to talk with a few other NGOs and we will send you the names of the ones which would be ready to discuss this matter further.

We also will shortly be forwarding useful consular information for Canadians who intend to marry Vietnamese citizens. You may wish to publish it or distribute it to any of your members who may have an interest.

Again, many thanks to you and all the other Vietnamese-Canadians who contributed to make my visits a useful and enriching experience.

Richard

Richard Lecoq
Ambassadeur/Ambassador
Ambassade du Canada/Canadian Embassy

Vietnamese Refugees in the Philippines

Over the last few years, the Vietnamese Canadian Federation has been working with Hoi Trinh, a Vietnamese born, Australian trained lawyer currently working in Manila, and refugee assisting organizations in other countries to lobby for resettlement of 2,000 Vietnamese refugees who have been stranded in the Philippines since the late 80's. Recently, the U.S. government has announced its decision to take in those who

have relatives in that country. VCF therefore asked the Canadian government to grant admission to do the same for those who have relatives in Canada. Following is a letter that VCF sent to the Minister of Immigration.

May 21, 2004

The Honourable Judy Sgro, P.C., M.P.
Minister, Citizenship and Immigration
Canada
Jean Edmonds South Tower 21st Floor
365 Laurier Ave. West
Ottawa, ON K1A 1L1

Dear Madam:

On May 26, 2002 I wrote to your predecessor, the Honourable Denis Coderre, to request that he grant ministerial permit for resettlement in Canada to 165 Vietnamese refugees who were stranded in the Philippines following their escape for freedom in the late 80s and early 90s (Attachment #1). Subsequently, our Federation has been in touch with Mr. Rick Herringer, Director, Resettlement Division Refugees Branch of your department, to explore how these refugees could be brought to Canada. I understand that the decision in this matter was contingent upon what the Government of the United States would decide to do regarding those refugees in similar situation who would like to resettle in that country. Now that the U.S. government has finally decided to offer resettlement to 1,855 of these refugees (Attachment #2), I would request that you re-open this file and allow those who have relatives in Canada to join their loved ones here.

Trusting that our request will receive a positive response from you, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Danh Nguyen, President

New Development in the Philippines: The United States and the Philippines announced a joint plan Thursday to offer resettlement to 1,855 Vietnamese asylum seekers living in the Philippines since 1989

(AP, Manila, April 15, 2004)

Officials said Washington will offer resettlement interviews to most of the group, many of whom have relatives living in the United States. The Philippines will make its best effort to offer residency to those whom Washington is unable to interview or approve, a statement said.

"Both governments recognize that this is an extraordinary and important measure to finding a comprehensive humanitarian solution," said a joint statement from Philippine Justice Secretary Merceditas Gutierrez and U.S. State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Kelly Ryan.

It said Washington "will apply generous refugee-screening standards when conducting interviews," but that spouses and children of Filipino citizens will not be considered for resettlement in the United States.

Gutierrez told The Associated Press the asylum seekers, most living in southwestern Palawan province, are the last Vietnamese boat people in the Philippines. "They are given now the opportunity to be interviewed for possible resettlement in the United States... that's a breakthrough," Gutierrez said.

Thousands of Vietnamese, risking high seas and pirates, have sought and been granted

refuge in the Philippines following the communist victory in Vietnam in 1975. The bulk of the boat people have been resettled in the United States and other countries.

Others have been sent back to Vietnam. The asylum seekers covered by the joint plan are those who have "been screened out" or have been determined as economic, not political, refugees, officials said.

MEDIA REVIEW

Vietnam to silence online dissent

Agence France-Presse - Correspondents in Hanoi, MAY 13, 2004

VIETNAM has introduced tough new laws regulating the use of the Internet in an apparent bid to silence online dissent.

The Ministry of Public Security's mouthpiece, the An Ninh The Gioi, said Wednesday that the new rules were necessary "to tighten the management of internet operations".

Under decision No. 71, which came into force in March, taking advantage of the web to disrupt "social order and safety" or to breach the communist nation's "fine customs and traditions" are "strictly forbidden".

"Storing on internet-connected computers information, materials or data classified as state secrets," is also prohibited.

Furthermore, accessing foreign Internet Service Providers to visit websites firewalled by the authoritarian regime is outlawed.

Internet cafe owners must also comply with a lengthy list of regulations or face legal action. They include recording "full and detailed information" about all their

customers.

Only around 3.2 per cent of Vietnam's 80 million people surf the web, mainly through cyber-cafes. Many analysts believe the biggest constraint on the growth in internet usage is Hanoi's desire to control and censor the online world to prevent it from being used as an anti-government tool.

The new rules follow a June 2002 decree by Prime Minister Phan Van Khai that ordered all internet cafes take action to prevent access to pornographic sites and those that revealed "state secrets" and "reactionary documents".

On May 5, Vietnamese cyber-dissident Nguyen Vu Binh had his seven-year jail sentence and three-year house arrest order for espionage upheld.

He was found guilty on December 31, 2003, of communicating with overseas "reactionary" organisations as well as writing articles and sharing information that "distorted the party and state policies".

Binh, who denied all charges, was detained in September 2002 after posting an article on the internet criticising a controversial Vietnam-China land border accord.

The 35-year-old pro-democracy advocate was the latest in a series of journalists and intellectuals to have been arrested and tried over the past two years for using the internet to voice dissenting opinions.

International human rights groups have accused Hanoi of using national security as a pretext to silence criticism of the one-party regime.

Vietnam halves jail term for dissident

priest

HANOI, June 16 (Reuters) - Communist Vietnam has granted clemency for the second dissident in a week, reducing by half the jail term for an outspoken Catholic priest whose release has long been sought by human rights groups and diplomats.

Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, 58, has been a thorn in the side of Hanoi for more than 20 years, accusing it of interfering in church activities. Ly had provided testimony to Washington accusing Hanoi of religious repression. Citing Ly's "good attitude and conduct" and full compliance with Nam Ha prison's rules, the local people's court on June 12 ordered the jail term cut by five years, said a report by state-run Vietnam News Agency distributed by the government.

With the reduction, Ly will serve a five-year jail term plus five years of house arrest. The news comes just two days after Vietnam said it had granted early release from prison on Saturday for Le Chi Quang, 34, who published criticisms of Hanoi on the Internet. He had served more than two years of a four-year jail term. Both men had been listed as "prisoners of conscience" by Amnesty International. Ly was accused of undermining national unity and originally sentenced in 2001 to 15 years in jail plus five years of house arrest. That jail term was cut in 2003 to 10 years.

Diplomats were surprised by the clemency. While Hanoi has selectively reduced punishments for dissidents, it is rare for two high profile cases to be changed at the same time. "I think it is probably an attempt to bolster its reputation," one diplomat said. Diplomats noted the announcements came after a visit last week by some embassies to the Nam Ha prison where Ly was held to

check on conditions and before a European Union human rights dialogue with Vietnam. The dialogue, held twice a year, is scheduled for June 22 and is to include discussions about the treatment of prisoners. Another diplomat said Vietnam might be feeling international pressure after fresh accusations it abuses human rights. An uprising by ethnic tribespeople in the Central Highlands in April apparently over religious and land rights refocused scrutiny on Hanoi's treatment of such issues.

Vietnam routinely denies it represses human rights. It permits the practice of six religions including Catholicism, but insists on vetting all aspects of their operations including leadership appointments.

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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