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Vietnamese Canadian Federation Fédération vietnamienne du Canada

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FEDERATION NEWS

**Visit to Canada by Communist Vietnam's
Prime Minister PhanVan Khai**

On the occasion of the visit to Canada by Communist Vietnam's Prime Minister Phan Van Khai on June 27-29, 2005, the Vietnamese Canadian Federation coordinated with other Vietnamese organizations in Canada a demonstration on Parliament Hill, and the publication of an open letter to the Prime Minister of Canada calling for democracy, freedom, and respect for human rights in Vietnam. Following are the Press Release on this demonstration and the open letter.

The Federation also made arrangements for representatives of the the Vietnamese community to meet with the Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to discuss the political situation in Vietnam prior to Mr. Khai's arrival in Canada.

Press Release

**Call for Freedom, Democracy, and
Respect for Human Rights in Vietnam:**

**Demonstration on the Occasion of the
Visit to Canada by Communist Vietnam's
Prime Minister Phan Van Khai:
12 noon to 2 p.m., Monday June 27, on
Parliament Hill**

The Vietnamese community in Canada will stage a demonstration on Parliament Hill Monday June 27 (12 noon to 2 p.m.), on the occasion of the visit to Canada by Prime Minister Phan Van Khai of Vietnam, to call public attention to some serious issues concerning Vietnam:

1. The obstacle to democratic reform in Vietnam due to the monopoly of power vested in the Communist Party of Vietnam by the Vietnamese constitution;
2. Lack of freedom of expression;
3. Harassment and imprisonment of religious leaders and political dissidents;
4. Lack of transparency in the application of the laws; and
5. Unfair treatment of people in South Vietnam on the part of the Vietnamese government and its refusal to commit to an unconditional reconciliation with all its citizens, regardless of their past and present political orientation.

These issues were highlighted in an open letter to Prime Minister Paul Martin, endorsed by several organizations within the community¹, and published in the Ottawa

¹ Vietnamese Canadian Federation, World Vietnamese Buddhist Order, Alliance for Democracy in Vietnam, Vietnamese

Citizen on June 23. This letter calls upon the Prime Minister to use Mr. Khai's visit to demand the freeing of Vietnamese religious leaders and political dissidents who are either imprisoned or under house arrest, and to press Vietnam for promoting freedom, democracy, and respect of human rights. The Prime Minister was also asked to urge Vietnam to proclaim a policy of national reconciliation so that all Vietnamese - both inside the country and overseas - can contribute to its reconstruction and development.

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**Remarks by Hon. David Kilgour, M.P.
Edmonton-Mill Woods-Beaumont
Vietnamese Canadian Federation Rally
Parliament Hill, June 27, 2005.**

Good afternoon,

As you may know, Senator Mac Harb and I were in Hanoi several months ago. Both of us were pleased that the government of Vietnam welcomed us warmly, as we welcome them now.

Hanoi has changed enormously for the better since our last visit about eight years ago and there is tremendous potential in Vietnam today. The Vietnamese communities all over the world are some of the most hard-working and entrepreneurial.

Human Rights Association of Ontario,
Democracy for Vietnam – Montreal
Center, Viet Democracy Network, Vietnam
Reform Party, Canadian Federation of
Vietnamese Veterans, International
Committee for Religious Freedom
in Vietnam (Canada)

We are pleased to note that there have been a number of positive developments recently. Following our visit, the Vietnamese government released the following political and religious prisoners:

Mr. P.H Son
Mr. L. C. Quang
Dr. Nguyen Dan Que
Prof. Nguyen Dinh Huy
Father Nguyen Van Ly

An additional twelve prisoners of conscience have been released since. On another positive note, Vietnam has been selected as a member of Canada's 25 nations to receive aid, which means greater cooperation between our peoples, and greater potential for positive change.

There are, however, a number of worrying areas. Vietnam continues to persecute and imprison ethnic and religious minorities who attempt to practice their faith.

Recent statements by the Vietnamese government on their commitment to religious freedom will only hold water if they are complemented by actions. The same counts for the harassment of journalists and cyber-dissidents. An independent and privately-run media is key to building a truly democratic society, including the freedom to criticize one's own government.

Another area for concern is the plight of refugees along the Cambodia-Vietnam border – the UNHCR must be allowed to monitor the situation closely, in order to ensure that refugees are guaranteed all the rights they are subject to under international law.

Vietnam is moving in the right direction. The recent release of the aforementioned prisoners, and Canada's legal guidance reveal glimpses of positive effects of reform. Canada has been offering training to judges in Vietnam in order to strengthen its legal system and the rule of law. Yet I would urge the government of Vietnam to continue to set positive examples, and to show Canadians that their efforts are benefiting all Vietnamese regardless of their ethnicity and religion. The strengthening of the rule of law is one of the most basic building blocks for a democratic society, and an independent judicial system based on recognized international principles is a necessity.

With the freedoms of speech and religion, rule of law, pluralism, and a democratic core, all the people of Vietnam can realize their true potential. The UN Special Rapporteurs, international human rights groups, international trade and business partners, neighboring countries, and countries like Canada can all offer a helping hand. Vietnam is on the right path, and I sincerely hope that the progress continues to come quickly, with the will of the Vietnamese government.

Thank you.

A Call for Respect of Human Rights and Democracy in Vietnam - Open letter to Prime Minister Paul Martin on the occasion of the visit to Canada by Vietnam's Prime Minister Phan Van Khai

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

We understand that next week, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai of Vietnam will pay an official visit to Canada. Since this is the first time that a highest-level representative of the post-war Vietnamese Communist

government will come here, we, Canadians of Vietnamese origin, earnestly hope that the Canadian government will use this opportunity to convey to him our serious concerns regarding the lack of freedom, respect of human rights, and democracy in Vietnam.

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the Vietnamese Communists have imposed a dictatorial regime on the whole country, with absolute power concentrated in the Communist Party of Vietnam. This is enshrined in Article 4 of the Vietnamese constitution adopted in 1992, which reads as follows:

The Communist Party of Vietnam, the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, the faithful representative of the rights and interests of the working class, the toiling people, and the whole nation, acting upon the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Ho Chi Minh's thought, is the force leading the State and society.

In this state of affairs, as Lord Acton once observed, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Vietnam has become one of the most corrupt countries in the world, where human rights are subject to blatant abuses, and political dissidents are routinely and mercilessly persecuted. These facts have been well documented by such diverse international organizations as Transparency International, Human Rights Watch, Reporters without Borders, and the U.S. International Commission on Religious Freedom. The widespread corruption in Vietnam has resulted in abject poverty of the majority of the population while enriching the elite few, including a large number of Party members.

We would, therefore, like to bring to your attention the following issues for your meeting with Mr. Khai:

1. Democratic Reform

The primary obstacle on the road towards democracy in Vietnam is the aforementioned Article 4 of its constitution. Therefore, in order to carry out democratic reform, this self-serving and progress-blocking article should be abolished.

2. Freedom of Expression

There is no independent news media in Vietnam. Furthermore, the government regularly jams selective radio broadcasts from overseas such as the BBC, Radio France International, and Radio Free Asia, and uses firewalls to prevent public access to overseas Vietnamese websites deemed politically sensitive. Given that freedom of expression is one of the key elements of free and democratic countries, among which Canada occupies a prominent place, the Canadian government should urge Vietnam to stop these practices. In addition, Canada should demand that under the principle of reciprocity, as a condition of entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Vietnam allow unrestricted entry of cultural products from other countries.

3. Religious Freedom

Vietnamese authorities continue to subject religious organizations to maltreatment, harass their practitioners, and persecute their leaders.

Human Rights Watch, in its news bulletin of June 17, 2005, indicates that the government of Vietnam seeks to exercise control over

virtually every aspect of religion, from the ordination of Catholic clergy to the prohibition of flood relief efforts by the non-government sanctioned Buddhist organization, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. In addition, it notes that despite the recent high-profile prisoner releases and new directives on religion, the government continues to arrest and imprison ethnic minority Christians in the northwestern provinces and Central Highlands and pressure them to recant their faith.

Canada should demand that the Vietnamese authorities stop this policy and immediately release the religious leaders who are currently imprisoned or under house arrest, including the Most Venerables Thich Huyen Quang, Thich Quang Do, and Thich Thien Minh of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam; Messrs. Tran Van Hoang and Bui Van Hue of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church; Reverends Nguyen Van Ly, Nguyen Huu Giai, and Pham Van Loi and Brother Nguyen Thien Phung of the Catholic Church; Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, Evangelist Pham Ngoc Thach, and Ms. Le Thi Hong Lien of the Mennonite Church; Pastor Than Van Truong of the Vietnam Baptist General Conference; and Pastor Nguyen Lap Ma of the Christian Missionary Alliance.

4. Political Prisoners

Since 1975, many political dissidents in Vietnam have called for respect of human rights, freedom, and democracy. Instead of listening to their constructive and reasonable suggestions, the Vietnamese government has subjected them to various forms of harassment, including house arrest, detention without trial, and harsh imprisonment. This policy of suppressing

dissenting political views is detrimental to the peaceful evolution of the political system of the country and is unacceptable in a civilized world. Canada should urge Vietnam to abolish it, and to release and stop harassing political dissidents such as Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, Professors Nguyen Dinh Huy and Nguyen Thanh Giang, and Messrs. Hoang Minh Chinh, Pham Que Duong, Ha Sy Phu, Pham Hong Son, Nguyen Vu Binh, Nguyen Khac Toan, and Phuong Nam Do Nam Hai, among others.

5. Lack of Transparency in the Application of the Laws

Many overseas Vietnamese are unwilling to go back and work or start businesses in Vietnam due to the lack of transparency and to the arbitrariness in the application of the laws by the Vietnamese authorities. Canada should demand that the Vietnamese government take steps to remedy this situation.

6. National Reconciliation and Equal Treatment for All Citizens

Since taking over South Vietnam by force in 1975 in flagrant violation of the Paris Peace Accord of 1973 which they themselves signed, the Vietnamese Communists have subjected the people of South Vietnam to discriminatory treatment due to their association with the previous regime. Many of them have been treated as social outcasts and denied the rights enjoyed by ordinary citizens. This practice is widespread in all fields, including education, and economic and political activities.

The above situation stems basically from the refusal of the Vietnamese authorities to declare a policy of national reconciliation. Although they have called for national solidarity and cooperation, and openly advocated a policy of reconciliation with their former foreign enemies, including France and the United States, they have yet to embark upon reconciliation with their own compatriots in South Vietnam who either did not support them during the war or currently oppose their dictatorial rule.

So long as "national reconciliation" is not officially declared by the government, it is impossible for those who oppose the regime, including the Vietnamese who have sought refuge abroad, to join in a national effort of rebuilding and developing the country. While this process takes time, the Vietnamese government should at least show its good-will and readiness to start it by taking the following concrete steps:

i/ Apologizing for the death of thousands of former members of the government and armed forces of South Vietnam, and the harsh treatment of many others who were incarcerated in concentration camps disguised as "re-education camps"; for the death of hundreds of thousands of refugees at sea or on land, and the suffering of millions of those who were forced to flee the country after the war;

ii/ Providing care to South Vietnamese veterans on the same basis as those who fought on the North Vietnamese side and allowing the restoration of the cemeteries of South Vietnamese soldiers that were razed in revenge at the end of the war; and

iii/ Acknowledging that Article 4 of the current Vietnamese constitution is the major obstacle on the road to a free, democratic, and prosperous Vietnam and committing to abolish it.

Mr. Prime Minister:

Over the last three decades, Canada has provided invaluable aid to Vietnam. We all appreciate that. We feel, however, that the Canadian government could do more. In particular, it should use Mr. Khai's visit to express Canada's strong interest in seeing Vietnam move resolutely in promoting freedom, democracy, and respect of human rights, and in proclaiming a policy of national reconciliation so that all Vietnamese, both inside the country and overseas, can contribute to its reconstruction and development.

Yours sincerely,

*Vietnamese Canadian Federation
World Vietnamese Buddhist Order
Alliance for Democracy in Vietnam
Vietnamese Human Rights Association of
Ontario
Democracy for Vietnam – Montreal Center
Viet Democracy Network
Vietnam Reform Party
Canadian Federation of Vietnamese
Veterans
International Committee for Religious
Freedom in Vietnam (Canada)*

Ottawa, June 23, 2005

Joint Statement by Canada and Vietnam

June 27, 2005, Ottawa, Ontario

Prime Minister Paul Martin held talks today with Prime Minister Phan Van Khai of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, during the first official visit to Canada by a Vietnamese Head of Government. The Prime Ministers discussed recent developments in both countries, bilateral relations, and issues of mutual interest.

The two leaders noted the continued development of the relationship between Canada and Vietnam over the past three decades. They affirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation in the framework of a comprehensive, stable and long-term partnership. To this end, they expressed their support for strengthening government, commercial and civil society linkages.

Prime Minister Martin welcomed the positive momentum of Vietnam's economic, legal and judicial reforms and its significant achievements in poverty reduction, and noted Canada's contribution to this process through its Judicial Education and Grassroots Development project announced in November 2004. Both leaders recognized the importance of Official Development Assistance to the bilateral relationship. Prime Minister Martin noted that Vietnam is one of 25 key development partners where Canadian assistance will be concentrated, in accordance with Canada's new International Policy Statement. He committed to continuing to assist Vietnam in important areas of governance, rural development and basic education, as well as addressing the regional challenge of transnational health issues. The Prime Ministers witnessed the

signature of two Memoranda of Understanding between the Canadian International Development Agency and the Government of Vietnam on banking reform and food and agriculture products quality and control.

The Prime Ministers also discussed Canada and Vietnam's growing trade and investment relationship and agreed that an expanded and more balanced trade relationship would benefit both nations. The Prime Ministers were pleased to recognize the satisfactory conclusion of bilateral negotiations for Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization. They also welcomed an agreement to reopen Vietnam's borders to Canadian beef and to continue discussions on access for live animals.

The Prime Ministers agreed to further enhance people-to-people linkages through such means as the recently concluded agreement to permit the resumption of adoptions between the two nations.

The Prime Ministers expressed their support for a continued frank and constructive dialogue on sensitive and important issues such as human rights, democracy, religious freedom and improving the situation of ethnic minorities.

Prime Minister Khai thanked the Canadian government and people for helping Vietnamese immigrants integrate into Canadian society while maintaining their cultural identity. He noted that this has contributed to the strength and vibrancy of the Vietnamese-Canadian community, which numbers almost 250,000. They noted with

satisfaction the contribution by the Vietnamese community in Canada to the promotion of friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries.

The two leaders noted their countries' constructive cooperation in international fora such as the United Nations, La Francophonie, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and APEC, which Vietnam will host in 2006. Prime Minister Martin also reiterated that Canada looks forward to working closely with Vietnam as its next ASEAN coordinating country.

The leaders also discussed the problem of global overfishing and its implications for sustainable development.

Prime Minister Martin was honoured to receive Prime Minister Khai's invitation to visit Vietnam, and noted that he looked forward to attending APEC in Hanoi in 2006.

Declaration commune du Canada et du Vietnam

Le 27 juin 2005, Ottawa (Ontario)

Le Premier ministre Paul Martin s'est entretenu aujourd'hui avec le Premier ministre Phan Van Khai, de la République socialiste du Vietnam, pendant la première visite officielle au Canada d'un chef de gouvernement vietnamien. Les premiers ministres ont discuté des développements récents dans les deux pays, de relations bilatérales et d'enjeux d'intérêt commun.

Les deux chefs ont souligné l'évolution continue de la relation entre le Canada et le Vietnam au cours des trois dernières

décennies. Ils ont affirmé qu'ils s'engageaient à renforcer la coopération bilatérale dans le cadre d'un partenariat global, stable et à long terme. À cette fin, ils se sont déclarés en faveur du renforcement des liens gouvernementaux, commerciaux et au sein de la société civile.

Le Premier ministre Martin a salué l'essor positif des réformes économiques, juridiques et judiciaires du Vietnam, de même que les réalisations significatives en matière de réduction de la pauvreté. Il a également souligné la contribution du Canada à ce processus grâce au projet de formation des juges et de développement communautaire annoncé en novembre 2004. Les deux chefs ont reconnu l'importance de l'aide publique au développement dans la relation bilatérale. Le Premier ministre Martin a souligné que le Vietnam était un des 25 principaux partenaires du développement où l'aide canadienne sera concentrée, conformément au nouvel énoncé de politique internationale du Canada. Il s'est engagé à continuer d'aider le Vietnam dans des secteurs importants tels la gouvernance, l'aménagement rural et l'éducation de base, de même qu'à relever le défi régional que représentent les questions relatives à la santé d'ordre transnational. Les premiers ministres ont assisté à la signature de deux protocoles d'entente entre l'Agence canadienne de développement international et le gouvernement du Vietnam concernant la réforme du système bancaire et la qualité et le contrôle des aliments et des produits agricoles.

Les premiers ministres ont également discuté de l'intensification de la relation entre le Canada et le Vietnam en ce qui a trait au

commerce et aux investissements, et ils ont convenu qu'une relation commerciale étendue et plus durable profiterait aux deux nations. Ils étaient enchantés de constater la conclusion satisfaisante des négociations bilatérales relatives à l'adhésion du Vietnam à l'Organisation mondiale du commerce. Ils ont en outre accueilli favorablement l'entente concernant la réouverture de la frontière vietnamienne au bœuf canadien et la poursuite des discussions concernant l'accès des animaux vivants.

Les premiers ministres ont convenu de continuer à renforcer les liens entre les personnes, notamment grâce à l'entente conclue récemment afin d'autoriser les adoptions entre les deux nations.

Les premiers ministres ont exprimé leur volonté de maintenir un dialogue franc et constructif eu égard à des questions délicates et importantes comme celles des droits de la personne, de la démocratie, de la liberté religieuse et de l'amélioration de la situation des minorités ethniques.

Le Premier ministre Khai a remercié le gouvernement et le peuple canadiens d'avoir aidé les immigrants vietnamiens à s'intégrer à la société canadienne tout en conservant leur identité culturelle. Il a souligné que cela avait contribué à la force et à la vitalité de la communauté vietnamienne du Canada, qui compte près de 250 000 personnes. Ils ont constaté avec satisfaction la contribution de la communauté vietnamienne du Canada à la promotion de relations amicales et axées sur la coopération entre les deux pays.

Les deux chefs ont souligné la coopération fructueuse de leurs deux pays au sein

d'organisations internationales comme les Nations Unies, La Francophonie, l'Association des Nations de l'Asie du Sud-Est et l'APEC, dont le Vietnam sera l'hôte en 2006. Le Premier ministre Martin a également répété que le Canada sera heureux de collaborer étroitement avec le Vietnam alors qu'il sera le prochain pays coordonnateur de l'ANASE.

Les chefs ont aussi discuté du problème de la surpêche mondiale et de ses incidences sur le développement durable.

Le Premier ministre Martin était honoré que le Premier ministre Khai l'invite à visiter le Vietnam, et il a affirmé se réjouir à la perspective d'assister à l'assemblée de l'APEC à Hanoi, en 2006.

House of Commons Debate – Monday June 27, 2005

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC):
Mr. Speaker, not every Canadian has been made aware of the visit of the Prime Minister of Vietnam to Canada this week, nor are they familiar with the lack of democracy and violations of human rights taking place.

The disrespect for democracy and human rights is so evident that even when the Vietnamese prime minister was holding discussions with the President of the United States last week, 10 Buddhist monks were arrested in Hanoi for exercising democracy.

It is imperative that the Prime Minister of Vietnam be questioned about his government's human rights violations. Will the Prime Minister emphasize this issue with

the Vietnamese government's appalling treatment of its own citizens?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs raised the issue this morning in his discussions with the Vietnamese officials and I intend to raise it this afternoon in my meeting with the Prime Minister of Vietnam.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Vietnam is not getting any better. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are subject to the will of the government, activists are being arrested for no reason and tortured and detained in unacceptable conditions.

The Prime Minister of Vietnam is in Canada today on an official visit. Will our Prime Minister address the issue of human rights with his Vietnamese counterpart or will he remain silent about it as he did in China?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said yes in English. His response was quite clear to me. I can confirm that this morning I had the opportunity to meet with the Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam, and we raised these extremely important issues of freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

I know that the Prime Minister will have the opportunity to raise these issues with his counterpart, the Prime Minister of Vietnam, this afternoon during our other meetings with this country, with which we have a good bilateral relationship. We work with this country in ASEAN and APEC. It is

important that we remain committed to them.

MEDIA REVIEW

Canada blasts Vietnam's human rights record, supports WTO bid

(AFP, Monday June 27)

The first prime minister of Vietnam to visit Canada in over 30 years was welcomed by human rights protesters outside parliament, while inside Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin offered both praise and criticism.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai signed agreements with Canada in the areas of banking, agriculture, disease prevention, and adoptions.

Khai also secured a commitment for unspecified financial aid and Canadian support for his country's bid to join the World Trade Organization -- but not without getting an earful about his country's poor human rights record.

"The prime minister and I had a substantive discussion about human rights, including religious freedoms and freedom of expression. I told the prime minister that Canada has many citizens of Vietnamese origin and that many came to Canada because of concern regarding respecting human rights, including freedoms in Vietnam," Martin said.

"While it's true that our nations have different histories, live under different conditions, and we have different cultures, we in Canada believe that the culture of freedom should be and must be universal," he said.

Reporters Without Borders, a non-profit group that promotes free speech around the globe, urged the Vietnamese PM to release Pham Hong Son, a young pharmaceutical executive sentenced to five years in prison in 2003 for posting a Vietnamese translation of a pro-democracy article produced by US embassy staff in Hanoi online.

"The government has shown some evidence of goodwill with the recent release of several prisoners of opinion," the non-profit agency said in a news release, urging reforms.

Khai dismissed the criticisms, suggesting that more Canadian government officials need to visit his country to better understand the situation.

The two heads of state also announced the resumption of Canadian beef exports, for cattle under 30 months of age, to Vietnam and an end in coming weeks to the 2001 moratorium on Vietnamese adoptions by Canadian parents.

Vietnamese PM rebuffs Martin's concerns over human rights; Martin raised human rights issues Monday in meetings with Phan Van Khai

(The Globe and Mail, Monday, June 27, 2005); Canadian Press

Ottawa — Vietnam's prime minister has dismissed Canada's concerns about human rights violations in his country, characterizing reports of abuse as "local" misunderstandings in dealing with reforms.

Prime Minister Paul Martin raised human rights issues Monday in meetings with Phan Van Khai.

Khai is the first leader of the Southeast Asian nation to visit Canada in more than three decades.

"We understand the fact that there may be some problems concerning the implementation at the local level concerning the policy, the laws," Mr. Khai said through an interpreter at a news conference.

"However . . . rapid progress has been made in Vietnam concerning the promotion of democracy, human rights and religious freedoms." Canada has long urged Vietnamese governments to end the practice of detaining citizens for expressing religious or political views.

"Canada has many citizens of Vietnamese origin," Mr. Martin told Mr. Khai at the news conference.

"Many came to Canada because of concerns regarding respect for human rights and political freedoms in Vietnam.

"I share these concern. In fact all Canadians do."

The Conservatives say Vietnam has an appalling record of dealing with its own people, pointing to the arrest last week of 10 Buddhist monks in Hanoi while Mr. Khai was meeting U.S. President George W. Bush in Washington.

As the Martin government debates same-sex marriage legislation, Mr. Khai laughed at questions of how his government deals with equality rights of gays and lesbians, suggesting there are few homosexuals in Vietnam.

"This is not a serious problem in Vietnam at the moment," he said. "Only a few people, I

think. "The issue has not been rising or debated in Vietnam."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF
THE OTTAWA CITIZEN (July 6, 2005)

Canada should lobby hard for freedom in Vietnam

In the joint Canada – Vietnam statement issued at the official welcoming ceremony in honour of Vietnam’s Prime Minister Phan Van Khai (Ottawa, June 27), he “thanked the Canadian government and people for helping Vietnamese immigrants integrate into Canadian society while maintaining their cultural identity”. It’d have been nicer had he included Vietnamese refugees as well, since by far the majority of Vietnamese in Canada are those who fled his dictatorial regime following the end of the Vietnam War.

While Mr. Khai extended an olive branch to the Vietnamese here, his government pressured the Malaysian government to destroy a monument erected by former boat people at Pulau Bidong to commemorate the thousands of refugees who died fleeing Vietnam after 1975. This cruel action shows that not only the Vietnamese Communist government can’t tolerate those who currently object to its dictatorial rule, it also wants to take revenge on those unfortunate refugees who drowned in the perilous South China Sea, starved to death, or were killed by pirates.

The above document also mentions “The Prime Ministers were pleased to recognize the satisfactory conclusion of bilateral negotiations for Vietnam’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO)”. While this is a positive step which will help transform the Vietnamese economy, Canada

should demand that under the principle of reciprocity, Vietnam allow unrestricted entry of cultural products from other countries. This is a crucial to freedom of expression which is non-existent in Vietnam, where there is no independent news media and the government regularly jams selective radio broadcasts from overseas, and uses firewalls to prevent public access to websites deemed politically sensitive.

Over the last three decades, Canada has helped Vietnam a lot. It could do more by continuing to press Vietnam to move resolutely in promoting freedom, democracy, and respect of human rights, and in proclaiming a policy of genuine national reconciliation so that all Vietnamese, both inside the country and overseas, can contribute to its reconstruction and development.

Danh T. Nguyen
Vietnamese Canadian Federation

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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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