

Canada should lobby hard for freedom in Vietnam

Re: Vietnamese PM's visit to bring out protesters, JUNE 26.

In the joint Canada-Vietnam statement issued at the official welcoming ceremony, Vietnam's Prime Minister Phan Van Khai thanked the Canadian government and people for helping Vietnamese immigrants integrate into Canadian society while maintaining their cultural identity.

It would have been nicer had he referred to Vietnamese refugees, since most of the Vietnamese in Canada are those who fled the dictatorial regime after the Vietnam War.

While Mr. Khai extended an olive branch to the Vietnamese in Canada, 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 Vietnam's communist government can't tolerate those who object to its dictatorial rule, and that it wants to take revenge on the refugees who drowned in the perilous South China Sea, starved to death, or were killed by pirates.

The joint statement 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 that 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 radio broadcasts from overseas and uses firewalls to prevent public access to websites deemed politically sensitive.

Canada has helped Vietnam a lot but could do more by continuing to press Vietnam to move resolutely in promoting freedom, democracy and respect for 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.

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