

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 17, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We wish you well on your trip to South East Asia in May. We hope and expect that your presence in the region will contribute to its peace and stability.

It is with respect to Vietnam that we write you today. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that the peoples gathered in the United Nations respect fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of the human person. Moreover, this shared recognition is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations. Article 18 explicitly sets forth the right to religious liberty:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Nations committed to human rights and the rule of law later concluded a more explicit document, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, to which Vietnam acceded on September 24, 1982. Notably, Article 18, Section 2 of the Civil and Political Covenant states:

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

We believe that the prolonged sequestering, sometimes called “pagoda arrest,” of the Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Do, violates these universally-recognized principles. The leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam is an 87 year-old man and is recognized as a “prisoner of conscience” by Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights, PEN International, and the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights. He has suffered exile, imprisonment, and detention almost uninterruptedly since 1982.

In your upcoming meetings with Vietnam’s President Tran Dai Quang, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, and the General Secretary of the Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong, with whom you met last summer, we urge you to call for the immediate release of Thich Quang Do. We ask you, as our President, to reinforce to your Vietnamese interlocutors that the United States is


committed to human freedom and dignity. Please tell them that we share Thich Quang Do's belief, expressed to US Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski in August 2015 and cited by the International Buddhist Information Bureau, that human rights are essential and that society must rest on mutual respect and the rule of law.

We hope that you use your upcoming trip to the region to convey the profound concern of the United States for Thich Quang Do and our support for the principles for which he has suffered so long and unjustly. Thank you for your efforts to promote human rights in Vietnam and throughout South East Asia.

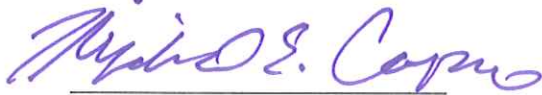
Sincerely,



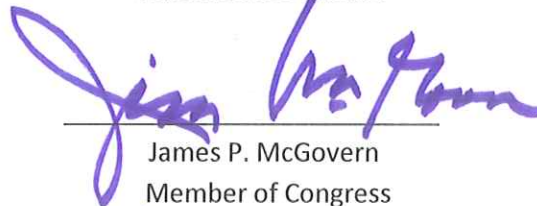
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



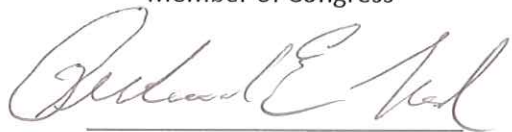
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator




Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



Katherine Clark
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Joseph P. Kennedy III
Member of Congress