



Vietnam Committee on Human Rights

VIETNAM COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ♦ QUÊ ME : ACTION FOR  
DEMOCRACY IN VIETNAM ♦ Ủy ban Bảo vệ Quyền làm Người Việt Nam

Affiliated to the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), NGO accredited to the United Nations, Unesco and the Council of Europe

## Australia's Human Rights Dialogue with Vietnam

Submission to the 13<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Dialogue in Hanoi, August 2016

The **Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR)** welcomes the forthcoming Australia-Vietnam Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue to be held in Hanoi in August 2016. Launched in 2002, the dialogue has become an accepted policy tool in Australia's human rights diplomacy, and its existence is no longer in question. However, after almost fifteen years of implementation, the lack of human rights progress in Vietnam raises serious questions about the impact of the dialogue process. As stressed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), "*the most important goal of Australia's human rights diplomacy is to make practical improvements to the human rights situations in other countries*". Yet in Vietnam, such practical improvements have still to come. On the contrary, in recent years, Police violence and harassment of dissidents has increased, and the government continues to adopt new laws and regulations that restrict the exercise of human rights. The VCHR is particularly concerned by violations of religious freedom and repression against the **Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam**. This paper outlines our main concerns and contributes recommendations for Australia's ongoing efforts to improve the human rights dialogue and increase its effectiveness for change.

### The Human Rights Dialogue – an Effort towards Progress or a Shield against Scrutiny?

Australia is the only Asia-Pacific country to have a bilateral human rights dialogue with Vietnam (other countries are the United States, the EU, Switzerland and Norway). The dialogue presents an important opportunity to discuss ways to strengthen human rights protection and encourage progress on specific issues. But dialogue can only be effective if it is a two-way process. We are concerned that Vietnam is using the dialogue, and other international initiatives, as a shield to deflect world scrutiny from its extremely troubling human rights record.

In its national reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council at its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2009 and 2014, Vietnam claimed that the very fact that it engages in human rights dialogues with Australia and other countries is in itself a human rights "*accomplishment*". This is surely not the Australian perspective. At the 2014 UPR, Vietnam rejected 45 concrete proposals for advancing human rights, including Australia's important recommendations to strengthen press freedom protections and bring the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedures Code into line with its international treaty commitments.

Whatever may be said during the private bilateral dialogues, Vietnam has a human rights policy that contrasts fiercely with its international human rights commitments. Whilst it has acceded to seven core human rights instruments and enshrines freedom of expression, religion, assembly and association in its 2013 Constitution, Vietnam tolerates no pluralist views and rejects criticism of

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Communist Party policies as attempts by “hostile forces” to undermine the regime.

## **Human Rights Education – creating a Culture of Human Rights**

Not only does the Vietnamese government violate human rights in practice, but it perpetrates an “Asian values” concept of human rights in its teaching manuals which is totally inconsistent with international law. Current textbooks in Vietnam’s schools and universities contest the universality of human rights and condition them on cultural, historic and political specificities.<sup>1</sup> This means that young Vietnamese will grow up with a wrong understanding of human rights, and this will impact Vietnam’s policy-making and practices for generations to come. In the dialogue, Australia should impress upon Vietnam the need to **review school and university textbooks**, as recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, so that human rights education is consistent with the principles accepted by Vietnam as a UN member state and signatory of the ICCPR and ICSECR.<sup>2</sup>

## **Measuring Improvements on the Ground: the Gulf between Rhetoric and Reality**

Since 2002, Australia has raised a wide range of human rights concerns in the dialogue with Vietnam, including the situation of ethnic minorities, freedom of religion, restrictions on the use of the Internet, freedom of expression and association, national security provisions, criminal law and judicial reform, the death penalty, domestic violence and trafficking in women. Australia has commended Vietnam’s “open, frank and constructive discussion” on these subjects. However, in many areas, practical progress is not reflected on the ground.

## **Freedom of Religion or Belief: the draft Law on Belief and Religion**

Although religious freedom is guaranteed in the 2013 Vietnamese Constitution, repression on religious grounds remains widespread. VCHR is very concerned about the new “**Law on Belief and Religion**” which will soon be adopted by the National Assembly. The law, which is now in its 5<sup>th</sup> draft (VCHR has a copy of “5c” draft made in March 2016, attached in annex) contains many provisions that seriously contravene the right to freedom of religion and belief as guaranteed in the Vietnamese Constitution and ICCPR Article 18. The very definition of a religious organization is “a grouping of people who believe in the same system of religious dogmas, canon laws and religious rites, which is organized according to a given structure **recognized by the State**” (our emphasis). This is contrary to international norms. As stressed by UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB in his report on his visit to Vietnam, “**the right of an individual or group to their freedom of religion or belief can never be “created” by any administrative procedures**” and “**registration should be an offer by the State but not a compulsory legal requirement**”.<sup>3</sup>

The draft Law provides no legal personality for religious organizations that cannot or choose not to apply to register with the state. Indeed, the very definition of a religious organization is “a group of people who follow the same system of religious doctrine, precepts and rituals, and **who are organized in a fixed structure recognized by the government**” (Article 2.11 – our emphasis).

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<sup>1</sup> “Given differences in political regime, development level, cultural value and historical background, approaches to human rights might vary from country to country. Vietnam’s position is that no country has the right to use human rights as a means or pretext to interfere into another country’s internal affairs, create confrontation and political pressures, even use force or impose conditionalities in economic and trade relations with others” (Some facts on Legislation regarding Human Rights: a teachers’ manual for classes on civic education and law”, December 2012, Communications Department for Legal Education, Ministry of Justice, Hanoi).

<sup>2</sup> Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Visit to Viet Nam, 18 - 29 November, 2013 Preliminary conclusions and recommendations, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14038&LangID=E>.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Addendum, Mission to Viet Nam (21 to 31 July 2014), Heiner Bielefeldt, ref. A/HRC/28/66/Add.2, 30 January 2015, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/014/16/PDF/G1501416.pdf?OpenElement>.

Non-recognized, independent organizations and forms of religion or belief that have no organizational structure are thus left in a legal limbo, with no legal safeguards or guarantees as to whether or how they may conduct religious activities, raise funds, open bank accounts, carry out humanitarian operations, own assets, or buy or sell property.

Under the law, the authorities have insight over all religious organizations' internal affairs, including the appointment of religious leaders, the content of religious training or education. It empowers the authorities to suspend religious festivals on grounds of "national defence or security", and contains vaguely-worded provisions that could be used to discriminate against ethnic minorities and independent groups. Rather than protecting religious freedom, if adopted as such, the new law would criminalize many aspects of religious activity and reinforce State control and management of religions in Vietnam (*see more detailed analysis of the law in our report "State Management of Religions in Vietnam" in annex*).

***We urge Australia to press Vietnam not to adopt the draft in its present form, and to work on a new draft which conforms with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Vietnam is a state party.***

### **The situation of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam**

The **Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV)** is Vietnam's largest and oldest religious organization, and its situation is of particular concern. Banned effectively in 1981 following the creation of the State-sponsored Vietnam Buddhist Church, its leaders and members are subjected to detention, intimidation and constant harassment. Despite repeated appeals from the international community, Vietnam has not re-established the UBCV's legal status. The UBCV has not applied to register because it does not accept the government system of registration and control. Moreover, the Vietnamese authorities have made it quite clear that they will never recognize the UBCV as long as Thich Quang Do, a prominent and respected advocate of religious freedom and human rights, remains its leader.

Despite repression, the UBCV pursues its legitimate religious activities *de facto* if not *de jure*. Since 2005, the UBCV's Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do has set up a network of Representative Boards to fulfill the educational, spiritual and humanitarian needs of people in the poor provinces. To date, some 20 Representative Boards have been created, in the provinces of An Giang, Ba Ria-Vung Tau, Bac Lieu, Binh Dinh, Binh Thuan, Binh Thanh District (Saigon), Dong Nai, Dong Thap, Hai Phong, Khanh Hoa, Lam Dong, Phu Yen, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Districts (Saigon), Quang Nam-Danang, Quang Tri, Thua Thien-Hue, Tien Giang and Tuy Hoa.

Since their creation, however, and despite their purely religious and social activities, members of UBCV Representative Boards have suffered Police interrogations, intimidation, public "denunciation sessions" and even expulsion of monks and nuns from their Pagodas. In many cases, Police have hired local thugs to vandalize UBCV property and assault monks and nuns. Lay-followers have also suffered threats and harassments. Local authorities and Security Police punish Buddhists who frequent UBCV Pagodas by refusing to deliver permits and vital administrative papers, expelling their children from school or making them lose their jobs.

The UBCV Representative Board in **Danang (Giác Minh Pagoda)** and its Superior monk **Thích Thanh Quang**, 79, are subjected to continuous repression by the local authorities. Thích Thanh Quang is the Deputy Head of Viện Hóa Đạo, the UBCV's Executive Institute, and head of the UBCV Commission for Youth. For the past three years, the local People's Committee has prohibited the Pagoda from celebrating Buddhist festivals such as Tết (Lunar New Year) or Vesak (Buddha's Birth) and intimidated Buddhists who try to attend. Followers wishing to bring offerings and food to Thích Thanh Quang and his monks are obliged to come at dawn and lay their offerings at the Pagoda's gate to avoid Police reprisals. Plain-clothed local militia have repeatedly assaulted Thích Thanh Quang. He is currently in very poor health. He suffers from malnutrition and related illnesses

as he is prevented from receiving food and medicine from his followers. In May 2016, Police prevented him from travelling to Ho Chi Minh City to meet the delegation of Australian diplomats scheduled to meet UBCV leader Thich Quang Do.

On 15 December 2015 in Thừa Thiên Huế, several hundred Security Police and civil defence agents surrounded the UBCV's Long Quang Pagoda, blocking approach roads with police vans to prevent Buddhists from attending a traditional festival named Memorial Day. Police and local officials systematically visited all local sections of the UBCV, the BYM and the homes of local Buddhists, warning them to stay away from the event. In Hương Thủy village, Buddhist youth leader **Nguyễn Tất Trữc** was subjected to continuous threats and harassments by local Police. He is currently under strict Police surveillance. Despite all these threats and obstacles, several hundred UBCV monks, nuns and followers, as well as BYM leaders from southern and central Vietnam succeeded in overcoming obstacles to attend the event.

### **The Buddhist Youth Movement**

Vietnam has also intensified repression against members of the Buddhist Youth Movement (BYM), an educational organization affiliated to the UBCV. Although the BYM is not officially recognized by the Communist authorities, it is tolerated because of its educational activities. Based on the Scouts movement, the BYM has a membership of over 300,000 young Buddhists in Vietnam today. In a government crackdown on the UBCV in January 2014, over 100 members of the BYM were placed under house arrest.

**The leader of the BYM, Le Cong Cau** is the target of systematic harassments, threats and Police interrogations. In 2014, he was arrested after visiting Thich Quang Do in Saigon. Police confiscated his laptop computers and mobile phones, and placed him under house arrest in Hue for several months without charge. In an audio message sent clandestinely to the United Nations during Vietnam's Universal Periodic Review, Le Cong Cau said the authorities had cracked down on the BYM because it had introduced human rights education into its youth camps. On 22 April 2015, Le Cong Cau was again intercepted by Police and detained for three days questioning. Police accused him of posting articles on the Internet calling for the legalization of the outlawed UBCV, and warned that he could be arrested and prosecuted *"anytime"*. He is still under Police investigation, and subjected to numerous "working sessions" (interrogations), although there is no formal ban or indictment against him. He was held under house arrest during the Communist Party Conference in Hanoi (January 2016) and prevented from travelling to Ho Chi Minh City to meet the Australian diplomatic delegation in May 2016 without any explanation.

**The treatment of UBCV Patriarch Thich Quang Do, 88**, is particularly cruel and inhumane. Detained under different forms (prison, internal exile, house arrest) for the past three decades for his peaceful advocacy of religious freedom and human rights, he is currently under effective house arrest at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Ho Chi Minh City. Thich Quang Do is under constant Police surveillance, denied citizenship rights, and his visits and communications are monitored. Although some diplomatic visits are allowed, others are prevented, and Buddhists who visit him are frequently subjected to harassments and threats by the local authorities and Police, who say that Thich Quang Do is a "criminal". The Vietnamese authorities cynically tell the international community that he is "free" – although they recently informed high-level foreign diplomats in Hanoi (who ask not to be quoted) that Thich Quang Do may travel, but he is not allowed to practice or preach his religion. The VCHR is gravely concerned that this prolonged house arrest and isolation is seriously affecting Thich Quang Do's health.

***- We urge Australia to urgently press Vietnam to immediately and unconditionally release Thich Quang Do and publicly announce that he is free, lift all constraints, surveillance and Police controls, cease harassment of visitors and allow Thich Quang Do full freedom of religious activity, movement and communication.***

**- We also call upon Australia to urge Vietnam to recognize the legal status of the UBCV and all other religious bodies who cannot or choose not to register with the state. As the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB declared, the autonomy of religious organizations is the litmus test for religious freedom in Vietnam.**

## **Upholding International Human Rights Standards: the crucial issue of Legal Reforms**

The VCHR is very concerned about Vietnam's **lack of progress in bringing domestic legislation into line with its international human rights treaty commitments**. This is one of the most important challenges to human rights, for there can be no lasting progress if Vietnam does not urgently provide an enabling domestic framework to protect its citizens' rights. Vietnam has acceded to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) since 1982, and it formally guarantees human rights in its 1992 Constitution. Yet it restricts their exercise by a whole arsenal of domestic legislation which conditions human rights on compliance with the interests and policy of the ruling communist party. Since the one-Party State which has extensive control over the executive, legislative and judiciary powers, these provisions gravely limit, if not completely nullify, the exercise of human rights.

### **2015: The Reformed Criminal Code**

In November 2015, Vietnam adopted a reformed **Criminal Code**, as recommended by Australia at its 2014 UPR. It came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016. However, disregarding repeated recommendations by the international community, Vietnam failed to abrogate or review the vaguely-worded "national security" crimes in the Code which are routinely invoked to arrest and detain dissidents and civil society activists. In fact, the reformed Code even added a new national security crime of "*terrorism against the state*" (Article 113) which carries the death penalty. Ambiguously-worded offenses such as "*undermining national solidarity, sowing divisions between religious and non-religious people*", (Article 116, formerly 87); "*conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*" (Article 117, formerly 88) which is routinely invoked to detain bloggers and "cyber-dissidents" for peacefully circulating their views online; "*abusing democratic freedoms to encroach on the interests of the state*" (Article 331, formerly article 258) remain in place, only their numbers have changed. Disturbingly, Article 109 (formerly 79) on "*activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration*" which carries the death penalty is increasingly invoked to sanction acts of peaceful expression. These national security provisions make no distinction between violent acts such as terrorism and the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression, are totally inconsistent with the ICCPR. This broad interpretation of national security enables Vietnam to declare in international fora that: "*there are no political prisoners in Vietnam, only people who violate the law*".

### **2016: the amended Press Law**

The amended **Press Law**, adopted in April 2016 and coming into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017, places increased restrictions on freedom of expression. It increases the number of "prohibited acts" from four to thirteen. Banned activities include publishing "*distorted information about the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*" perceived to "*defame the people's government*", "*run contrary to the country's international unity policies*", "*cause alarm amongst the people*" or "*sow division between the people and State authorities*". The diffusion of "*confidential information*" and "*state secrets*" is banned, and the lack of a clear definition of these terms enables the authorities to apply this classification to virtually any document. Contrary to recommendations by the United Nations and civil society to bring Vietnam's laws into line with international standards and norms, the amended Press Law continues to criminalize a wide range of activities which are left solely to the appreciation of the state, such as "*propagating depraved lifestyles*", "*violating the country's traditions and values*", or "*distorting history*,"

*denying revolutionary achievements or offending the nation or its heroes*". The amended Press Law still does not authorize the publication of independent newspapers in Vietnam.

A new law on "**Access to Information**" was also adopted in April 2016 which is inconsistent with international standards of transparency and accountability. This law concerns the right to know, or the right of individuals to access information held by public authorities. This Law on Access to Information does not override existing legislation, but stipulates a number of grounds for restricting access to information which are unacceptable under international law. These include "*state secrets*", which are not defined, or vague terms such as "*social order and ethics*", "*State security*", "*interests of the nation, people and State*", or "*propaganda*". Moreover, the public will only have access to information produced after the law comes into force, and only information declassified by government. There is no time frame provided for the declassification of information. In addition, the law is dissuasive and cumbersome, requiring citizens who seek access to information explain why they need this information, and provide details of their names, addresses and ID or passport numbers.

## **5. Restrictions on the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

In March 2016, the Ministry of Public Security issued Circular 13/2016/TT-BCA on "**Regulations on the duties of the People's Security forces in protecting Court hearings**", which came into force on 24 April 2016. The Circular instructs Security Police on how to maintain security enforcement during Court hearings and ensure the protection of court officials, lawyers, witnesses, evidence and people attending the trial (Article 3). Whereas these are customary measures in countries respectful of the rule of law, Circular 13 contains a clause on "**Handling situations of gatherings causing public disorder in the vicinity of trials**" (Article 14) which violates internationally-recognized rights to freedom of assembly.

Under Article 14, if people gather outside a trial, Police must first issue verbal warnings to dispel them. But if the demonstrators do not comply, Police may "*immediately deploy forces to prevent the disturbance of public order, isolate and arrest opposition elements, instigators and leaders of the disturbance*". Given the broad interpretation of "disturbing public order" in the Vietnamese Criminal Code which makes no distinction between violent acts and the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and assembly, Circular 13 virtually gives Security forces *carte blanche* to suppress demonstrations and arrest human rights defenders protesting unfair trials or expressing solidarity with fellow activists.

Although **freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration** is guaranteed in principle (Article 25 of the 2013 Constitution), this right is denied in practice in Vietnam. Vietnam has no law on demonstrations. A draft law before the National Assembly has been delayed because of disagreement on the text. Demonstrations are regulated by **Decree 38/2005** which prohibits gatherings outside State agencies and public buildings, and bans all protests deemed to "*interfere with the activities*" of Communist Party leaders and State organs. **Public Security Circular 09/2005/TT-BCA** on the implementation of Decree 38 prohibits gatherings of **more than five people** without permission from the State. These anti-demonstration regulations have been widely invoked by Police in 2016 to quell nationwide demonstrations in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and other major towns protesting the massive water pollution and fish deaths caused by the Formosa Steel Corporation.

There are no independent associations, trade unions, human rights NGOs or civil society organisations in Vietnam. All associative activity is controlled by the Communist Party and the Vietnam Fatherland Front, a para-governmental umbrella body of "mass organisations". Under Decree 45 on Associations (2010), associations are directly linked to governmental programmes, and effectively serve as government ministries. The government can intervene in all their operations, including vetoing membership or introducing members of its own choice. It is important to understand

that NGOs from Vietnam are in fact GONGOs (Government-organised Non-governmental Organisations). The problem of Vietnamese GONGOs is an increasingly serious issue at the UN, where NGO speaking time is limited. GONGOs use their time to extol government policies, thus stifling the true voices of civil society.

#### 4. The Death Penalty

Statistics on the death penalty are State secrets in Vietnam. However, the death penalty is regularly invoked for a wide range of crimes. In December 2014, General Trần Văn Độ, Deputy Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court said that approximately 200 people are sentenced to death each year in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

In its **reform of the Criminal Code** in 2015, Vietnam reduced the number of crimes punishable by death from 22 to 18. The government officially announced that it had **reduced the death penalty on seven crimes**, but in fact it added one new "national security" crime and simply reworded and displaced two drug-related offences, thus removing the death penalty for a total of **four crimes only**. Despite strong international recommendations, no steps were taken to remove capital punishment on "national security" crimes in the Criminal Code's reform. In July 2011, Vietnam adopted a law authorising executions by lethal injections instead of by firing squad, estimating that this is more "humane". Because of an EU ban on exporting lethal substances, Vietnam has authorized the use of "local poisons" to reduce the backlog of prisoners on death row, estimated at over 500. Conditions on death row are appalling, and several prisoners have committed suicide rather than await execution under such *conditions* (see VCHR report "*The Death Penalty in Vietnam*" in annex). In June 2015, the National Assembly's Standing Committee declared that miscarriages of justice were on the rise, with at least 71 wrongful convictions over the past three years, several concerning crimes incurring the death penalty.

Amongst other restrictive regulations of concern in Vietnam is **Ordinance 44** (2002) on "**Administrative Detention**", which empowers local police to detain critics under house arrest, in psychiatric institutions or in rehabilitation camps for up to two years without any process of law. This is often used to detain civil society activists and human rights defenders.

#### Concerns and Recommendations on the Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue

We recognize the complex political and economic factors that impact human rights policies and practices, and we do not seek to draw simplistic conclusions about the Australia-Vietnam Dialogue and human rights progress on the ground. Progress is incremental, and results from a range of contributing factors. However, if the dialogue is to be a truly effective tool of Australian diplomacy and not mere "window dressing", we urge consideration of the following points:

- a) **Benchmarks:** As previously stated, Australia's aim in this dialogue is to achieve practical progress in human rights in Vietnam. Progress must therefore be measured by establishing benchmarks, which should be achieved within a determined time-frame wherever possible. A set of **specific objectives** (even minimal ones) should be set for **each Human Rights Dialogue**, based on these benchmarks for measuring progress. NGOs and MPs should receive the list of specific objectives and benchmarks;
- b) **Regular Public Assessments of Progress:** To increase the transparency and accountability of the dialogue process, in addition to the current DFAT media release, a substantial assessment should be made after each round of the dialogue, based on these benchmarks and indicators of progress. The assessments should be made public, and discussed openly before the Human Rights Sub-Committee and Australian Parliament.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://ongbachau.vn/kinh-te/can-giam-ap-dung-hinh-phat-tu-hinh-c920a20141216070914587.htm>.

Australia could express satisfaction on progress, but also disappointment when progress is slow or non-existent;

- c) **Publish the list of individual cases of concern:** Australia could send a strong message of support to Vietnamese human rights defenders and their families by pressing for the release of prisoners and raising individual cases of concern. Currently, the list of these cases are prepared largely on the basis of input from NGOs, and sometimes the NGOs contributors are informed of the Vietnamese government's reply (if any). **But NGOs are not provided with copies of this list, which would help them significantly to coordinate their advocacy on behalf of these individuals.** So far, the list is kept confidential, for the efficiency of diplomatic demarches. But in cases where real progress is minimal, publication of the list, or parts of it, could produce more effective results;
- d) **Overall Human Rights Strategy:** The Human Rights Dialogue can only achieve results if it is part of an **overall strategy** that includes political pressure and public scrutiny at every level. We urge Australia to raise human rights issues at all bilateral meetings with the Vietnamese authorities and in multilateral fora, Entertaining a human rights dialogue should not prevent Australia from publicly criticizing Vietnam, submitting Resolutions and making public statements calling for the release of political prisoners or condemning arbitrary arrests. It should examine the human rights impact of its trade policy with Vietnam through regular assessments. Moreover, the benchmarks of the dialogue should feed Australia's input to Vietnam's Universal Periodic Review, and Australia should consult with other countries to ensure that concerns raised in dialogues are addressed.

Vietnam would undoubtedly prefer to maintain its Human Rights Dialogue with Australia and other countries as a process behind closed doors. Boxing up human rights issues in this private process could only help Vietnam to continue its abuses, with no incentive for change. Australia can help to prevent this by mainstreaming human rights into every sphere of its relationship with Vietnam, including development, economic, financial and technical cooperation, trade and political and security issues. This way, Australia can ensure that the human rights dialogue does not constitute an end in itself, but contributes to real and lasting progress in Vietnam.

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