

Letter of the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do to US Congressman Alan Lowenthal



**GIÁO HỘI PHẬT GIÁO VIỆT NAM THỐNG NHẤT
VIỆN TẮNG THỔNG**

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Buddhist Era 2561

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The Honorable Alan Lowenthal
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C.

Saigon, 2nd February 2018

Dear Congressman Lowenthal,

I am informed by the UBCV's International Spokesman, Mr. Vo Van Ai, that you will speak at a Hearing in the US Congress on religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam.

I am happy to learn that the US Congress is concerned about human rights in my country. Recently, Vietnam has intensified repression against civil society activists, religious followers and human rights defenders on an unprecedented scale. We Vietnamese are not afraid to speak out, and today many young people are using their blogs or staging demonstrations to demand respect of the environment, freedom of expression, association and religion. But our voices are weak, for the Vietnamese authorities use their massive police force, unfair judiciary system and vast network of prisons to stifle our legitimate appeals. This is why Hearings in the US Congress are important, for they amplify the voices of all those who are putting their safety on the line to express their ideals and beliefs.

I speak as a victim, with first-hand experience of over three decades of repression. When I was just 19, I witnessed the summary execution of my Buddhist master in North Vietnam. After 1975, when Vietnam was united under communist rule, I was imprisoned, harassed, condemned to internal exile for 10 years, then imprisoned again, and finally placed under house arrest at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Saigon for the "crime" of launching an Appeal for Democracy in Vietnam. Since then, I have remained under house arrest without any due process of law. I am under constant Police surveillance, my communications are monitored and I am forbidden to travel. My letter to you today was sent through underground channels.

The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), of which I am the leader, is not recognized by the authorities, and our members suffer daily harassments, intimidation, repression and detention. Vietnam has adopted a new Law on Belief and Religion which came into force this month, but the authorities continue to persecute independent religious communities such as the UBCV.

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Today's word is focused on business, trade and development. But economic development is only sustainable if it is built on the foundations of democratic freedoms and human rights. I urge you to do your utmost, in the halls of the US Congress and beyond, to speak out loud and clear in defence of democracy, and keep up the fight to win freedom for all those who are deprived of their liberty simply for the peaceful exercise of their convictions and beliefs.

Yours sincerely,



Sramana THICH QUANG DO
Fifth Supreme Patriarch
Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam

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