



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

### **Advancing Human Rights through ASEAN: Vehicle for change?**

**Friday, June 10th, 2016**

**10:00 AM**

**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

#### **PRONOUNCE:**

#### **Closing Statement**

I would like to thank all of our distinguished witnesses for their testimony and their expertise. I must also thank my distinguished Co-Chair, Mr. McGovern, for organizing this important hearing, Mr. Lowenthal for his leadership on human rights issues in Southeast Asia, and the other Members of the Commission who regularly advocate on behalf of human rights around the globe.

As we head into the second half of the decade, the level of diplomatic, economic, and security engagement between the United States and ASEAN member states is only likely to grow. These are important partnerships and in many cases they should be strengthened, but not at the expense of fundamental human rights.

The Commission has kept a close eye on human rights developments in several ASEAN nations, including Vietnam, Burma, and Cambodia. Of particular concern to myself and many others has been the treatment of religious minorities in these three states, and especially in Vietnam and Burma. According to at least one source, dozens of pastors and church leaders remain imprisoned in Vietnam, and just last week U.N human rights officials condemned the “repeated arrest and

torture” of the wife of an imprisoned pastor who refuses to halt protests calling for her husband’s freedom.

In Burma, the plight of the Rohingya Muslim community has been well documented, and other religious minorities, including the pre-dominantly Christian Kachin and Chin continue to face harassment and assaults at the hands of the Burmese military.

These, and the many other human rights concerns that have been raised here today, should be acknowledged, discussed, and addressed by the ASEAN entity. No international or regional body that ignores the rights and freedoms of the people it was purportedly created to protect will be able to maintain credibility in the long term.

This Commission will continue to examine these issues and seek ways that the Congress and the United States can engage ASEAN and promote mechanisms for addressing human rights concerns. I look forward to working with the distinguished witnesses who have spoken here today, and with that, this hearing is adjourned.