

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission:
Advancing Human Rights through ASEAN

Rep. Lowenthal Statement

Thank you to the Co-Chairs, and thank you to the witnesses for joining us at this important hearing today. Many of the countries in ASEAN have extremely troubling records on human rights. Thailand has been ruled by a military junta since a 2014 coup, and efforts to restore democracy have been halting and uneven. In Burma, despite the historic election of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, the Rohingya people continue to face widespread persecution and displacement.

As the representative of the largest Vietnamese American and Cambodian American communities, I am specifically interested in Vietnam and Cambodia, and deeply troubled by recent developments in these countries. In Cambodia, opposition leader Sam Rainsy has been forced out of the country by an ongoing, politically-motivated government investigation. Now that he has fled the country, the government is going after deputy opposition leader Kem Sokha. The current political environment of fear and intimidation created by Hun Sen's government offers little hope for free and fair elections in 2017 and 2018.

That is why Congressman Matt Salmon and I have introduced a resolution supporting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Cambodia. Our resolution would unequivocally state the support of the House of Representatives for these principles in Cambodia.

In Vietnam, massive protests against the government's failure to adequately respond to an environmental disaster that has killed

millions of fish and poisoned thousands of people have been brutally suppressed. Vietnam continues to repress all forms of dissent, jailing bloggers, lawyers, and religious leaders.

I sent a letter to the President in February along with 34 of my colleagues, including Mr. McGovern, urging him to make human rights a priority at the first-ever US-ASEAN Summit at Sunnylands. I also repeatedly urged the President to raise human rights during his visit to Vietnam last month.

Thus far, I have been disappointed in what I see as the complete lack of progress on democracy and human rights in the region. Above all, I am disappointed by the Administration's decision to lift the ban on sales of lethal weapons to Vietnam. The State Department previously stated that this move would be tied to progress in Vietnam's human rights record, but as I mentioned before I see no basis for improvement. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses about how we can do a better job of promoting human rights in Southeast Asia. Thank you and I yield back.