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**Congress of the United States**  
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**CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS**  
**TALKING POINTS**  
**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**  
**Hearing**  
**Defending Prisoners of Conscience**

**Thursday, February 15, 2018**  
**2:00 – 3:30 PM**  
**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

- My fellow Members of Congress, panelists, and attendants here today, good afternoon to you all.
- My thanks to all the members of the Commission for holding today's hearing and inviting me to testify in my role as an **advocate for Ta Phong Tan**, just one of the many fearless and resilient prisoners of conscience.
- I would also like to thank the Commissioners McGovern and Hultgren in particular, for their continuous dedication and commitment for human rights.

- In December 2012, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, in conjunction with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and Amnesty International USA, launched the Defending Freedoms Project which gives Members of Congress the opportunity to bring awareness to human rights abuses and encouraging accountability on behalf of these prisoners of conscience.
- The ability to voice our thoughts and opinions is a powerful right many of us take for granted. To silence anyone is a gross injustice and it is our duty to stand up for the victims of these abuses.
- We cannot forget the plight of these prisoners, the sacrifices they have made and the causes they stand for. As Eli Wiesel said, “Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”
- According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 262 journalists have been imprisoned around the world in 2017, which is a new record that surpasses the historical high of 259 journalists imprisoned in 2016.
- I was pleased to adopt Vietnamese political dissident Ta Phong Tan who was arrested in September 2011 solely for expressing her thoughts as a blogger criticizing and exposing government corruption in her home country Vietnam.
- U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Tan has helped inspire “an awakening of citizen journalists and bloggers” who challenge government in Vietnam.

- Tan was sentenced to 10 years in prison and in the years she was there, she protested the mistreatment of prisoners.
- During this difficult time, Ta Phong Tan suffered through the loss of her mother who committed suicide by burning herself in protest of her daughter's unjust imprisonment.
- Despite these unfortunate turn of events, Ta Phong Tan has remained resilient and hopeful.
- She was released in 2015 and now resides in the US where she continues to fight for the justice of the people of Vietnam.
- Like Ta Phong Tan, we must never give up, leave no stone unturned in the path for striving to secure basic human rights for repressed people, wherever they may be.
- We must show the oppressors that the world will not stomach the injustice they unfurl onto innocent individuals.
- We refuse to leave these prisoners alone in their struggle and only with our actions can we lead humanity toward a positive change.
- Thank you to my fellow colleagues who have adopted prisoners of conscience through the Defending Freedoms Project.
- Rep. Randy Hultgren is the advocate for Zhu Yufu of China, Rep. James McGovern is reading the testimonies of Raif

Badawi and Nabeel Rajab, and **Rep. Alan Lowenthal**, is an advocate for Nguyen Cong Chinh.

- I would like to thank the speakers of today's event:
  - **Andrew Fandino**, Senior Program Officer, Amnesty International
  - **Kristina Arriaga**, Commissioner, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
  - **Melina Milazzo**, DC Director, Freedom Now
  - **Margaux Ewen**, North American Director, Reporters Without Borders
  - **Annie Boyajian**, Advocacy Manager, Freedom House
- I again, thank the Tom Lantos Commission and the Members of Congress involved in making this hearing successful.