

**Testimony of Mrs. Tran Thi Ngoc Minh
before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
January 16, 2014**

Members of Tom Lantos's Human Rights Commission,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Tran Thi Ngoc Minh, the mother of Do Thi Minh Hanh, 28 years old. My daughter became a prisoner of conscience simply because she was helping the poor factory workers, or assisting farmers whose lands and homes were wrongly expropriated by the Government.

As you sit here, in the United States of America, you may not know fully the conditions of the factory workers in Vietnam, those who created wealth, including commodities, such as shoes, clothes and other merchandises, which were sold to America. They have to work in abysmal conditions, and live in slums and unsanitary housings. There have been hundreds of cases of food poisoning as the employers provided factory workers with spoiled food. They work 12 to 15 hours per day and only get paid \$70 per month on the average. In many instances, they do not get paid, have no health or social security insurance, are fired for getting sick, and receive insufficient compensation if injured at work. They do not have the right to found independent labor unions to protect themselves.

My daughter Do Thi Minh Hanh and her two friends Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung and Doan Huy Chuong, along with others who sympathized with the desperate situation of these factory workers, helped the workers to defend their basic rights, but all three were arrested, beaten and given severe sentences.

Before them, Atty. Le Thi Cong Nhan and those attempting to form independent labor unions had been sentenced to prison terms. Particularly, Le Tri Tue had to flee to Cambodia to seek the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, but he was reportedly abducted by the Vietnamese police and has disappeared for the past six years.

My daughter was arrested on February 23, 2010 in Di Linh, Lam Dong Province and I witnessed the police beat her, causing serious injuries to her mouth and bleeding over her face. She was later put in solitary confinement for 8 months at a facility belonging to the Department of Public Security before being brought to trial.

At the first instance trial by the Provincial Court of Tra Vinh on October 26, 2010, my daughter and her two fellow activists had no defense lawyer, and I saw the police beat her brutally in the court's yard. They received heavy sentences: Hung to 9 years, Chuong and my daughter each to 7 years of imprisonment.

In March 2011, the Tra Vinh police let common criminals beat my daughter up badly.

In April 2011, while being transferred to Long An, she was handcuffed, her legs shackled, and her mouth gagged. She was beaten during the journey.

On May 6, 2011, she was transferred to Binh Thuan and moved through different camps. There, my daughter repeatedly opposed forced labor imposed on her.

At the end of April 2013, my daughter was transferred to Dong Nai Province. When she protested against forced labor and mistreatment of prisoners, the police let a number of criminal inmates physically assault her. Once she was beaten while taking a shower and being all naked. Due to those beatings, she suffered nervous pain. In addition, her left breast became atrophied and the pain was severe, but the prison administration did not allow her to see specialists for medical treatment.

To intimidate my daughter and our family, on October 2, 2013 the Government transferred my daughter and a religious prisoner, Mrs. Mai Thi Dung, from Dong Nai to Thanh Xuan, Hanoi. On this long journey of more than 1700 km, both of them, despite being seriously ill, were handcuffed and shackled in the van like animals. They lost consciousness several times.

Sincere her arrest, the police has pressured my daughter to admit to having committed crimes as condition for leniency, but she refused.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For all these years, the Vietnamese Communist Party has deceived the world, deceived the United Nations and also the United States about workers and labor unions in my country. Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) was established by the Vietnamese Communist Party; its entire leadership is composed of communist members. Its President, Mr. Dang Ngoc Tung, is a member of the VCP's Central Committee. VGCL's purpose is to monitor and control the workers, and help the party take advantage of them and exploit them.

Since 1995, there have been close to 5,000 strikes by workers. These strikes were organized by the workers themselves with the guidance of labor organizers who operate secretly. The labor union set up by the government has never been on their side; on the contrary, they provided information to the public security police to crackdown and arrest the leaders or workers who organized strikes.

Presently in Vietnam, there are hundreds of prisoners of conscience who live in hell on earth -- that is what prisons in Vietnam truly are -- like my daughter. They are United Farmers and Workers Organization member Doan Huy Chuong, college student Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung, Rev. Nguyen Van Ly, Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, journalist Nguyen Van Hai, Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu, businessman Tran Huynh Duy Thuc,

Atty. Le Quoc Quan, college student Dinh Nguyen Kha, person of faith Nguyen Van Lia, journalist Ta Phong Tan, South Vietnam veteran Nguyen Huu Cau, victim of social justice Mai Thi Dung, etc. I would like to present to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission the list of some 600 political and religious prisoners as attachment.

I know there are many international organizations coming to Vietnam to inspect the living conditions of workers and the detention conditions of prisoners. These organizations have been deceived by the Vietnam government, which prepared some nice and comfortable living compounds for workers and some clean cells for prisoners for show, and trained a number of workers and inmates to speak highly (but deceitfully) about the workplace or prison conditions in the Socialist Republic Vietnam.

Few people are aware that behind the beautifully decorated walls is the living hell that prisoners must face. Hundreds of prisons spreading throughout the country are factories producing goods for export, including cashew nuts and handicraft products. Prisoners who do not meet the quota are sent to solitary confinement or punished. Prison wardens and authorities have become increasingly wealthy by exploiting detainees.

I am very surprised and feel bitter when hearing statements of politicians, reports by a number of governments, and organizations that laud the Vietnamese government for its progress on human rights, its policies towards religions, and labor conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I understand that economic interests are of top priority for the United States; however in our eyes the United States is also the role model in the fight for human rights. That's exactly why I am present here today.

I respectfully request that, from your vantage point, please use all means to pressure the communist government of Vietnam to unconditionally release my daughter and all prisoners of conscience, especially as the U.S is negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with the communist government of Vietnam.

Thank you.

May God bless the United States of America and all of you.