

**TESTIMONY OF**

**ERIC P. SCHWARTZ**

**COMMISSIONER**

**U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**BEFORE THE**

**TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

**ON**

**THE PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN  
VIETNAM**

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I want to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for holding this hearing today and inviting me to testify on behalf of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

I commend the Lantos Commission for providing this opportunity to focus on religious freedom conditions in Vietnam. USCIRF has testified before Congress on Vietnam numerous times over the years. Each time the Commission hopes to report progress, but we regret that we cannot make such a report to you today. There remain continued and systemic limitations on religious freedom, privacy rights, and the freedoms of assembly, association and movement.

I also want to recognize the witnesses who will be testifying after me -- especially Father Phan Van Loi and sub-dignitary Nguyen Bach Phung. These brave individuals are testifying directly from Vietnam, and I believe their first-hand accounts will only underscore the imperative of religious freedom and other basic rights: the rights of people to think as they please, believe or not believe as their conscience leads, and live out those beliefs openly, peacefully, and without fear.

Finally, on a personal note, I welcome the chance to appear before you. Over the course of a 30 year career in public life, I've served in many positions involving human rights and humanitarian affairs: as Assistant Secretary of State for humanitarian affairs, as Senior NSC Director for Multilateral and Humanitarian Affairs and Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and as an official at the UN Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. But it was in my first full time human rights job, as director of what is now Human Rights Watch Asia, in the mid-1980s, that I authored my first major human rights publication, a joint publication with the Committee to Protect Journalists, on journalists in detention in Vietnam. So I'm pleased to be here today, though I do wish I had a more uplifting message to deliver.

## **Overview**

Vietnam is an authoritarian state ruled by the Communist Party. Its overall human rights record remains poor. Over the past few years, the government has moved decisively to repress any perceived challenges to its authority.

The Vietnamese government exerts control over religious activities through law and administrative oversight, severely restricts independent religious practice, and represses individuals and religious groups it views as challenging its authority. The government also continues to imprison individuals for religious activity or advocacy on behalf of religious freedom. The government uses a specialized religious police force (*công an tôn giáo*) and vague national security laws to suppress independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai activities and has sought to stop the growth of the Protestant and Catholic religions among ethnic minorities via discrimination, violence and forced renunciation of faith. In the past year, arrests and confrontations with the Catholic Church of Vietnam have escalated tensions.

The Vietnamese government made some important changes in the last decade, and we believe that these developments resulted at least in part from U.S. diplomatic efforts following the

Administration's designation of Vietnam from 2004 to 2006 as a "country of particular concern" (CPC) for systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom or belief. We note that productive diplomatic discussion and tangible improvements took place without apparent disruption of progress on other issues in the U.S.-Vietnam relationship. Progress included the fulfillment of a bilateral agreement to release prisoners and ban forced renunciations of faith, and to enact a religion law – though that law did not conform to international standards relating to the protection of religion and belief. Many religious leaders in Vietnam attributed these positive changes to the CPC designation and the priority placed on religious freedom concerns in the U.S.-Vietnamese bilateral relations. In 2006, the Administration removed the CPC designation for Vietnam due to this progress.

And indeed, there has been some relaxation of restrictions in Vietnam. According to the State Department's 2012 report on International Religious Freedom report, the government has registered new congregations, permitted the expansion of charitable activities and allowed large-scale worship services with more than 100,000 participants.

Unfortunately, these changes pale in comparison to the significant violations of religious freedom or belief in other areas. Religious believers and religious freedom activists continue to be jailed; police forcibly close venues of independent religious groups; legal protections for religious groups are uncertain and subject to arbitrary or discriminatory interpretations based on political factors; and ethnic minority converts to Protestantism and Catholicism, in particular, face discrimination, intimidation, and pressure to renounce their faith.

Given Vietnam's systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of the freedom of religion and belief, USCIRF recommended in 2013, as it has since 2001, that Vietnam be designated as a "country of particular concern" or CPC. Frankly, it is difficult to see how we should and would make any different recommendation for 2014.

## **Background**

A December 2013 op-ed in *The Hill* by Vietnamese Ambassador to the U.S. Nguyen Quoc Cuong is telling. While noting that the U.S.-Vietnam relationship benefits from being "a two-way street," he also emphasizes that "we must not let it detour over difficult challenges such as human rights," and with "our political, historical and cultural differences, it is understandable that the U.S. and Vietnam have differences on human rights." Yet the Ambassador also notes Vietnam's "embrace" of international norms enshrined in international agreements including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Notwithstanding the Ambassador's comment about Vietnam's embrace of human rights, Vietnam's overall human rights record has on balance deteriorated in the past year, as it has for the past several years. In the wake of ongoing battles within the Communist Party's leadership, the government has moved decisively to repress perceived challenges to its authority, tightening controls on freedom of religion, expression, association, and assembly. Over the past two years, new decrees were issued prohibiting peaceful protest, limiting speech on the internet, tightening controls on journalists and access to the Internet at cafes, and making it more difficult for religious communities to gain legal recognition. Decree 72, which was implemented last year,

authorizes internet censorship, prohibits individuals from summarizing news content on their blogs, and outlaws very vaguely worded “prohibited acts.” According to the State Department’s 2013 Human Rights Report, authorities detained and imprisoned some activists who used the internet to criticize the government and publish material on human rights and political pluralism. Political dissidents and bloggers continued to report that security services routinely ordered the disconnection of their home internet service.

At least some 100 to 200 prisoners of conscience continue to be detained in Vietnam, some for their religious activity or religious freedom advocacy. At least 63 human rights advocates were sentenced in the past year, most for vague national security crimes or criticizing the government online.

Prisoners of conscience from Vietnam are included in the Defending Freedoms Project, an initiative of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, in conjunction with USCIRF and Amnesty International/USA. Vietnamese prisoners are included in the Appendix to this testimony.

The U.S.-Vietnamese relationship has grown quickly in recent years, with increased security cooperation reportedly informed by Chinese claims to disputed islands in the South China Sea. But increased bilateral engagement, particularly in the areas of trade and defense, creates opportunities for valuable interaction and substantial progress on religious freedom and human rights. Unfortunately, that has not been the case in recent years.

### **Religious Freedom Conditions**

As mentioned, the government of Vietnam controls religious activities through law and administrative oversight, severely restricts independent religious practice, and represses individuals and religious groups it views as challenging its authority. Religious freedom conditions can vary depending on geographic area, ethnicity, relationships between religious leaders and provincial officials, and the perception of the authorities about the political nature of religious activity.

Every religious community in Vietnam experiences some level of control and oversight. Independent religious activity is actively suppressed. Religious communities which publicly challenge government policies face intimidation, detention, beatings, and attacks by men whom the State Department has termed “contract thugs.” In the past year, the Vietnamese government targeted independent branches of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao Buddhist church, independent Protestant house churches in the central and northwest highlands, Khmer Krom Buddhist temples, and leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV). Relations between Catholics and local government officials in Hanoi, Da Nang, Vinh, and Ho Chi Minh City deteriorated as peaceful protests over land disputes led to violence and arrests.

Vietnam also issued a revised decree on religion (Decree 92) that went into effect in January 2013. This decree continues government oversight and control of religious activity and reflects continued suspicion of religious individuals and groups. While it provides clearer timetables for registration, it does not improve the ill-defined and intrusive process of legal registration for

religious entities. Rather, it expands oversight of religious affairs and may make it worse by making it infeasible for any group that currently is not legally recognized from achieving legal status.

In addition, lingering property disputes over venues and facilities the Communist government previously confiscated have led to church demolitions, property confiscations, detentions and violence.

**Prisoners:** Dozens of individuals are detained for their religious activity or religious freedom advocacy, including: Fr. Nguyen Van Ly, UBCV patriarch Thich Quang Do, and Hoa Hao leaders Nguyen Van Lia and Tran Hoai An, and Protestant pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh remain in prison. Human rights defender Le Quoc Quan was also convicted of “tax evasion” and is serving a 3 year sentence. USCIRF delegations met with each of these prisoners of conscience during visits to Vietnam. In addition, two ethnic minority Protestant pastors, Ksor Y Du and Kpa Y Ko, remain in prison where they reportedly have been tortured, allegedly for being part of anti-government organizations and making calls to relatives in North Carolina. Church leaders have denied charges these individuals. Mai Thi Dung, who is serving an 11-year sentence for her activism in support of an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist sect, reportedly is suffering from several illnesses in prison

Specific religious freedom abuses this year include the following:

**Cao Dai:** In July, police raided the temple of an independent branch of the Cao Dai church. The government recognizes the Cao Dai faith, but unofficial branches have split off to protest government oversight and the curtailment of their religious ceremonies. The Long Binh temple in Tien Giang province was closed, its property turned over to the state-approved Cao Dai branch, and leaders were detained and warned not to start another temple. Violent confrontations and property confiscations have increased after the government approved new Cao Dai leadership in 2011 and started to crack-down on independent groups.

**Catholics:** In July, police arrested Ngo Van Khoi and Nguyen Van Hai, Catholics from the My Yen parish in Nghe An province. The two reportedly were seeking to repair or re-open a closed local shrine when they had a confrontation with police. A September prayer vigil for their release ended with police firing into the crowd, beating and injuring vigil participants, and detaining 15 people. Police claimed the crowd attacked them, a charge local priests, bishops, and eye-witnesses denied. The detainees were released on December 22, 2013 after serving six months in detention for “disturbing public order.” Tensions also remain high in Nghe An province after the January 2013 conviction and imprisonment of 14 mostly Catholic bloggers and democracy activists from the city of Vinh.

**Central Highlands:** In May, eight ethnic minority Montagnard members of an independent Catholic movement were sentenced to between 3 and 11 years in prison for “undermining unity” and “sowing ethnic and religious hatred” allegedly for working with banned overseas organizations in order to establish an independent state. Several also were charged with inciting protests against the relocation of their village in Gia Lai province. The Bishop of Kontum repeatedly has been denied access to the areas where the men reside. In November, four ethnic

minority Montagnard members of the Ha Mon Catholic movement were sentenced between 7 years, 6 months and 9 years in prison for “undermining national unity.”

**Hoa Hao:** Vietnam recognizes only one Hoa Hao group and actively suppresses independent pagodas and assemblies. Police raided the Quang Minh Tu pagoda in An Giang province, beating followers and spraying raw sewage into the holy site. Vo Van Thanh Liem, previously jailed for leading a similar unsanctioned Hoa Hao group, slashed his stomach in protest of the attack. The pagoda remains closed and followers were told to attend the state-sanctioned Hoa Hao venue. In the past year, police in An Giang, Can Tho, Vinh Long, and Dong Thap provinces harassed followers, barred them from worshipping, and prohibited public readings of founder Huynh Phu So’s writings.

**Khmer Buddhists:** Vietnamese authorities harassed Ta Set and Prey Chop temples in the Soc Trang province, leading to detentions, defrockings, and several monks seeking asylum in third countries. Monks Lieu Ny, Thach Thuol, and Ly Chanh Da were detained and defrocked allegedly because they were in contact with overseas Khmer Krom organizations. In September, Monks Thach Thuol and Lieu Ny were sentenced to six years and four years in prison respectively. Two other members of the Khmer Krom ethnic minority, Thach Phum Rit and Tra Quanh Tha, were also sentenced to 3 years and 2 years in prison. Monk Ly Chanh Da is in hiding, and several worshippers at Prey Chop temple, who blocked police entering the temple, were detained for several months.

**UBCV Buddhists:** The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam is the largest Buddhist organization in the country and refuses to join the state-sanctioned Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha (VBS). Police have detained UBCV leaders for over a decade, harassed worshippers attending known UBCV pagodas, and blocked attempts by the UBCV to organize provincial councils, youth organizations, and charitable and humanitarian assistance programs. In the past year, partly in response to the election of new leaders, police have increased pressure on the UBCV. In January, 2014 police in the city of Hue, forcibly stopped a planned UBCV commemoration ceremony, warning worshippers, beating a nun trying to attend the ceremony, and detaining over 15 monks. In February 2014, in Ho Chi Minh City, police rammed the motorbike and publicly beat monk Thich Chon Tam, a newly elected member of the UBVC executive board, and in Thua Thien-Hue province, police detained, interrogated, and later restricted the movement of Le Cong Cau, head of the 500,000 member Buddhist Youth Movement. Cau also was detained briefly in March 2013 for posting articles supporting the UBCV’s legal status.

### **Recommendations for U.S. Policy**

Given the Vietnamese government’s continued abuses of the human rights of its people, the United States should continue to link the overall expansion of U.S.-Vietnam relations with improved human rights conditions, including the freedom of religion or belief. Human rights should be pursued consistently, and both privately and publicly at every level of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship, including in the context of new military and trade agreements that are being negotiated. This effort should include Vietnam’s potential membership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a multilateral free trade agreement that would lower tariffs on goods entering each country from the other. Furthermore, new economic or security assistance programs started

in Vietnam should be accompanied by new and expanded initiatives in human rights and religious freedom, and internet freedom.

In its 2013 Annual Report, USCIRF urged the State Department to designate Vietnam as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act for the systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, and to identify a series of actions the Vietnamese government should take to alleviate religious freedom abuses, such as prisoner releases, legal reform, and the protection of religious practice. USCIRF currently is evaluating this designation for the 2014 Annual Report, but given conditions on the ground, it is difficult to imagine a different recommendation this year.

In response to religious freedom violations in Vietnam, the U.S. Congress should:

- Continue to highlight religious prisoners of conscience, including those imprisoned or detained on account of their advocacy of religious freedom and related human rights;
- New funds appropriated to expand bilateral economic or security relations should be augmented by new funding for efforts to encourage human rights and religious freedom. USCIRF also would encourage the Congress to urge that funding from the State Department’s Human Rights Democracy Fund (HRDF) be set aside for new religious freedom programming;
- Pass the Vietnam Human Rights Act (H.R.1897 / S. 1649) and the Fostering Rights through Economic Engagement in Vietnam Act (H.R.1682), both of which condition expanded economic benefits to Vietnam on human rights, including improvements in religious freedom. We note that both measures provide the President with great flexibility in implementation. USCIRF also has long supported measures that would impose sanctions on individuals who are complicit in human rights abuses, like the recently introduced Vietnam Human Rights Sanctions Act (H.R. 4254).
- Work with the Administration to encourage a readiness to use Priority 1 authority to accept refugees facing a well-founded fear of persecution. Under this priority category, which usually applies to individuals with compelling protection needs, the Administration can consider resettlement of individuals of any nationality. The Administration should be prepared to use this authority both for those who have fled to other countries in the region and those still in Vietnam, without the prerequisite of a referral by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; and
- Continue active oversight of the U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue by holding hearings on the progress report the State Department is required to submit on the trajectory and outcomes of bilateral discussions on human rights as required by PL 107-228, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 2003. The next dialogue is expected to take place in late spring or early summer.

## **Conclusion**

USCIRF's concerns about the state of religious freedom in Vietnam is reflected by the situation of Fr. Nguyen Van Ly. Father Ly is a prisoner of conscience whom Representative Chris Smith has adopted as part of the Defending Freedoms Project. Father Ly has spent more than 20 years in prison for the causes of religious freedom, democracy, and human rights. He is one of the founders of Bloc 8406 (a coalition advocating for democratic reforms) and past editor of an underground publication. Initially arrested in September 1977 and sentenced to 20 years in a labor camp near Hue, he later was released but prohibited from engaging in religious activities. He was returned to jail in 2001 when he submitted testimony to the U.S. Congress and USCIRF opposing a U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Act. On March 30, 2007, almost seven years ago, authorities prevented him from defending himself by literally muzzling him during a broadcasted show trial.

Prisoners of conscience like Father Ly, and the laws and policies that lead to his imprisonment and that of others, should receive major consideration in the evolving and expanding relationship between the United States and Vietnam. In short, as Vietnam continues to develop economically, it must uphold and protect, in law and practice, the universal demands of human dignity, including the universal right to the freedom of religion or belief.



## **Appendix: Vietnamese Prisoners in the Defending Freedoms Project**

**Doan Huy Chuong (m) and Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung (m)** are labor activists who were charged with disrupting national security and sentenced to between seven and nine years in prison for organizing workers at a Vietnamese shoe factory in 2010. Government authorities arrested Doan and Nguyen in early 2010 shortly after they helped organize workers at the My Phong shoe factory in Vietnam, where they distributed a leaflet outlining the striking workers' demands. Authorities held the two organizers for eight months before charging them with threatening national security. On October 28, 2010, 10 days after their indictment, the People's Court of Tra Vinh convicted them and sentenced Doan to seven years in prison and Nguyen to nine years in prison. The organizers were not permitted legal counsel or the opportunity to speak in their own defense. Although they were allowed a lawyer on appeal, the sentence was affirmed by the same court after another closed proceeding.

Throughout their detentions, Doan and Nguyen have been subjected to serious mistreatment. After arresting them, the government held them in solitary confinement for months. They have been the victims of repeated beatings, which often occur after one of their frequent prison transfers. As a result, Doan has lost the use of one hand. Despite continued poor health—including rashes and liver problems—they are forced to endure hard labor.

**Tran Huynh Duy Thuc (m)** is a Vietnamese blogger, entrepreneur and businessman, who was arrested in May 2009, and is currently serving a 16 year prison sentence. He was initially charged with theft of a telecommunications device, but the authorities were unable to find any evidence for this, and later charged Tran with “promoting anti-Socialist, anti-government propaganda” and undertaking “activities aimed at subverting the people’s government”. He was jailed, along with three other democracy activists, after a trial lasting just one day; his sentence is the longest ever handed down to a dissident in Vietnam in recent years. Tran is the founder and CEO of One-Connection Internet, an Internet service provider, and the author of several dissident blogs and articles on Vietnam’s economy.

**Nguyen Van Lia (m)** is a scholar in Hoa Hao Buddhism, a sect repressed by the Vietnamese authorities. According to state media, he possessed printed materials, CD’s, and DVD’s criticizing the Vietnamese government’s religious record. He had previously met in Saigon with the U.S. Consulate and the U.S. CIRF. He was sentenced to a five-year term on December 13, 2011 on the charge of “abusing democratic freedoms.”

**Tran Hoai An (m)** is a religious-freedom advocate and a member of the Hoa Hao Buddhist church, a sect which has been repressed by Vietnamese authorities. According to state media, he was arrested for possessing printed materials, CD’s, and DVD’s criticizing the government’s religious policies. He was sentenced to a three-year term on 13 December 2011 on the charge of “abusing democratic freedoms.”

**Pastor Duong Kim Khai (m)** is a pastor for the Mennonite Church in Vietnam, a long-time advocate for aggrieved farmers, a democracy activist and member of Viet Tan, an organization advocating for democracy. Since the early 1990’s, he has been detained or arrested thirteen times, often while trying to organize prayer sessions. He was jailed in 2004 for starting an

“illegal” religious group. Upon his release in 2006, he founded the Mennonite Cattle Shed Congregation in order to advocate for religious freedom and social justice, particularly to provide assistance to farmers so they could petition the government for redress in land disputes or corruption cases in Ben Tre and Dong Thap provinces. He also joined Viet Tan during this period. Pastor Duong Kim Khai was arrested on August 10, 2010 on the charge of “attempting to overthrow the government.” The condition of his health and place of detention were kept from his family by authorities until October 12, 2010, when the family received written confirmation of his arrest. On May 30, 2011, he was sentenced to a six-year prison term (later reduced to five years) followed by five-year term of house arrest. In 2011, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that the Hanoi government’s detention and conviction of Pastor Duong Kim Khai and six other land activists were in violation of international law.

**Paulus Le Van Son (m)** is a community organizer and prominent writer for *Vietnam Redemptorist News*. A resident of Hanoi, he is an active community organizer for issues such as HIV and public education; he also serves as member of the John Paul II Group for Pro-Life. His popular personal blog covers issues of social justice, human rights and sovereignty. He was arrested on August 3, 2011 on the charge of “attempting to overthrow the government.” His arrest was part of larger crackdown on human-rights defenders; seventeen others were arrested, mostly from Vinh Province. Le Van Son currently is serving a 4-year prison sentence, to be followed by another 4 year term of house arrest.

#### **Vietnamese Prisoners that have been adopted by Members of Congress:**

**Nguyen Tien Trung (Adopted by Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA))** is a Vietnamese blogger and activist who was arrested in July 2009 on charges of disseminating "propaganda against the socialist state" and "organization to attempt to overthrow the people's government". After a show trial in January 2010 that lasted just one day, he was sentenced to seven years in jail and 3 years' probation, and is currently in prison in Ho Chi Minh City. Trung has a Masters in information technology from France's Institut National des Sciences Appliquees de Rennes, and during his time there, wrote an open letter to Vietnam's Education Minister, demanding reforms to the country's highly politicized education system. In May 2006, he founded Viet Youth for Democracy, which called on world leaders to remind the Vietnamese government of its commitment to human rights. Trung is also Vice General Secretary of the Democratic Party of Vietnam, a peaceful group not recognized by the one party regime. (RWB)

**Cu Huy Ha Vu (Adopted by Representative David Price (D-NC))** is a prominent government critic and human-rights lawyer. He filed unprecedented lawsuits against the government, including suing Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung for violating laws on environmental protection, national security, and cultural heritage by approving a Chinese-run bauxite mining project in the Central Highlands. His law firm provided legal assistance to democracy activists and, prior to his arrest, to six Catholics from Con Dau parish who had protested government confiscation of Church properties. He was arrested on 5 November 2010, and on 4 April 2011 sentenced to seven-years in prison to be followed by three-years of house arrest. The charge was “propaganda against the socialist state.”

**Father Nguyen Van Ly (Adopted by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ))**. He has spent over 15 years in prison for the causes of religious freedom, democracy, and human rights. Initially arrested in September 1977 and sentenced to 20 years in a labor camp near Hue, he was later released but prohibited from engaging in religious activities. He was returned to jail in 2001 when he submitted testimony to the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom opposing a U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Act. On March 30, 2007, in a broadcasted show trial, authorities prevented him from defending himself in a broadcast show trial. He is one of the founders of Bloc 8406 (a coalition advocating for democratic reforms) and past editor of an underground publication. (USCIRF).

**Do Thi Minh Hanh (f) (Adopted by Representative Chris Van Hollen)** is a labor activist who, along with her two colleagues (**Doan Huy Chuong (m) and Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung (m)**) were charged with disrupting national security and sentenced to between seven and nine years in prison for organizing workers at a Vietnamese shoe factory in 2010. Government authorities arrested Doan and Nguyen in early 2010 shortly after they helped organize workers at the My Phong shoe factory in Vietnam, where they distributed a leaflet outlining the striking workers' demands. Authorities held the three organizers for eight months before charging them with threatening national security. On October 28, 2010, 10 days after their indictment, the People's Court of Tra Vinh convicted them and sentenced Doan and Do to seven years in prison and Nguyen to nine years in prison. The organizers were not permitted legal counsel or the opportunity to speak in their own defense. Although they were allowed a lawyer on appeal, the sentence was affirmed by the same court after another closed proceeding.

Throughout their detentions, Doan, Do, and Nguyen have been subjected to serious mistreatment. After arresting the three organizers, the government held them in solitary confinement for months. They have been the victims of repeated beatings, which often occur after one of their frequent prison transfers. As a result, Doan has lost the use of one hand and Do is deaf in one ear. Despite continued poor health—including rashes and liver problems—all three are forced to endure hard labor.

**Ta Phong Tan (f) (Adopted by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX))** is a Vietnamese dissident blogger. A former policewoman and a member of the Communist Party of Vietnam, she was arrested in September 2011 on anti-state propaganda charges for her blog posts alleging government corruption. On July 30, 2012 Ta's mother Dang Thi Kim Lieng self-immolated in front of the government offices in Bac Lieu Province in protest of the charges against her daughter. On September 24, 2012, Ta was sentenced to ten years in prison. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the State Department, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others protested her arrest.