

Opening Statement by Rep. Chris Smith
for H. Con. Res 320
February 28, 2006

There has been a tremendous amount of publicity lately about Internet dissidents in China, but I would like to bring to your attention the case of Dr. Pham Hong Son from Vietnam.

In March, 2002, police arrested Dr. Son. He had translated an article from the website of the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam, titled "What is Democracy," and sent it to his friends and senior Vietnamese officials. In addition, he had written an open letter, published on the Internet, protesting the fact that his house had been searched illegally and his computer and documents confiscated.

Dr. Son was charged with espionage by the government, which accused him of "collecting and dispatching news and documents for a foreign country to be used against the Socialist State of Vietnam." After a closed trial and a closed appeal, from which Western reporters and diplomats from Europe, the United States, and Canada were barred, Dr. Son was sentenced to five years, plus an additional three years of house arrest.

Dr. Son's case has been highlighted by the US Department of State's Human Rights for Vietnam repeatedly, Human Rights Watch, Reporters without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Amnesty International.

I went to Vietnam last December, and met with Dr. Son's extraordinary and courageous wife, Vu Thuy Ha (VOO TWEE HAH), who continues to campaign for her husband's freedom despite constant surveillance and harassment, which I personally witnessed. I knew that I could not let this brave woman battle alone. I met with many other political and religious activists, some of whom are under house arrest, like Father Ly and Thich Quang Do (TICH KWANG DO), of the Unified Church of Vietnam, and with the relatives of a number of prisoners of conscience. They need, and appreciate, our continued support.

Vietnam is at a critical crossroads: it wants to expand its burgeoning trade relations with the United States, and seeks to join the WTO. There will be no better time to convince Vietnam of the seriousness of our human rights concerns, and their centrality in any relation with the U.S. The European Parliament has already passed a resolution calling for Vietnam to release all prisoners of conscience, allow democracy and political pluralism, and ensure the human rights for Vietnam's Montagnards, and it is appropriate that we do the same.

There is an amendment, to reflect several factual corrections, and updates.

We have been informed by our Embassy that according to Vietnamese naming conventions, Dr. Son is more correct than Dr. Pham. This has been changed throughout.

The Supreme did not increase the house arrest portion of Dr. Son's sentence, it left it untouched at three years.

Finally, one dissident has been amnestied, but two more are suffering official harassment – typical one step forward, two steps backward. We have added and subtracted accordingly.