

TESTIMONY OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
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NOVEMBER 8, 1995

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HUMAN RIGHTS AND U.S. POLICY TOWARD VIETNAM

Human Rights and U.S. Policy Toward Vietnam

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to you today about an important aspect of our relations with Vietnam. I will begin by taking a few minutes to outline the current state of U.S.-Vietnamese relations and the part human rights concerns play in those relations. Mr. Coffey will then speak to you in greater detail concerning Vietnam's human rights record and our ongoing dialogue with the Vietnamese government.

Obtaining the fullest possible accounting for our POW and MIAs remains the Administration's highest priority in relations with Vietnam. As you know, on January 28, 1995 the United States established a Liaison Office in Hanoi. Following the President's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam, Secretary Christopher opened the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi on August 6.

The presence of a U.S. post in Vietnam has enhanced our ability to make progress in accounting for American POWs and MIAs, allowed us to advance the interests of U.S. companies, and made possible provision of consular services to U.S. citizens. Most important for the subject of this hearing, diplomatic relations has led to a deepening of our dialogue on human rights and an increase in the depth of our understanding of the current situation in Vietnam.

Since the President's announcement of diplomatic normalization with Vietnam in July, we have continued to receive strong cooperation from the Vietnamese on matters of importance to the U.S. Most significantly, SRV cooperation in our efforts to seek the fullest possible accounting for our POW/MIAs continues to be vigorous. We have continued to make progress in each of the four key areas identified by the President in 1993 (remains, discrepancy cases, trilateral cooperation, and documents).

-- Remains: With additional repatriations in August and October, remains believed to represent 31 Americans have returned to the U.S. from Vietnam in 1995. Since January, 1993, we have repatriated 174 sets of remains, including remains obtained through joint activities and those turned over unilaterally by the Vietnamese.

- The increased pace of repatriations of remains over the past two years is resulting in a significant number of identifications, the final step in accounting for missing Americans. Since January 1993, the remains of 45 Americans lost in Vietnam have been identified and returned to their loved ones.

Identifications completed this year include two individuals from the "last known alive" discrepancy case list and two from a list of 84 "Special Remains" cases on which we have evidence indicating the remains had once been under Vietnamese control.

- Discrepancy cases: The discrepancy case list is a subset of cases in which evidence suggests individuals could have survived their loss incident. Of the 196 individuals originally named on the list, the remains of 26 have been recovered and identified. As noted above, two of these identifications were completed this year. Since January 1993, we have confirmed the deaths of another 80 individuals, reducing the number whose fate remains unknown to 55. Vietnamese officials continuing to work closely with us to resolve these remaining cases.
- Trilateral Cooperation with Laos: Under a mechanism established in December 1994, Vietnamese witnesses to loss incidents in Laos continue to accompany U.S. investigators to sites in that country. Vietnamese witnesses played important roles in a number of investigations, providing information helpful in locating crash and grave sights.
- Documents: In response to our request, the Vietnamese set up search teams in the Ministries of Interior and National Defense. In 1995 the teams and other Vietnamese organizations and individuals have located and turned over to U.S. investigators a total of 295 documents totaling 563 pages. Included have been a number of documents containing leads on unresolved cases, including documents specifically requested by the National League of POW/MIA Families.

A Presidential delegation on POW/MIAs will visit Vietnam in December to review the efforts to date and to pursue further progress toward the fullest possible accounting.

Vietnam is also cooperating with us on other important matters, including counter-narcotics efforts, and regional security matters in the context of the ASEAN Regional Forum. We have concluded a good settlement for U.S. private claimants against Vietnam, settled our diplomatic property claims with Hanoi and are involved in ongoing negotiations over our pre-war government to government debts.

In addition, our governments are engaged in an ongoing dialogue on human rights. As Secretary Christopher said in Hanoi, "Progress in this dialogue will enable our two nations to further deepen our ties." As Mr. Coffey will describe in greater detail, the fourth round of these talks was held in Washington last month. I want to emphasize that in no sense do we confine our discussions of human rights with Vietnamese officials to the formal dialogue process. Human rights has been on the agenda in every single significant contact between U.S. and Vietnamese officials, including at senior levels. That is because we believe our human rights dialogue with Vietnam reinforces our political and economic interests across a broad spectrum. To borrow again from Secretary Christopher's speech in Hanoi, we believe "that the rule of law and accountable government are the bedrock of stability and prosperity."

Just three days ago we welcomed Vietnam's humanitarian gesture in releasing two American citizens, Nguyen Tan Tri and Tran Quang Liem, who had been detained since 1993. These releases came in response to direct requests by Secretary Christopher in Hanoi in August and here in Washington last month. We believe the releases demonstrate Vietnamese willingness to address our concerns in this area in the context of the overall expansion of our relationship.

Not surprisingly, economic and trade ties are an area of paramount interest for the Vietnamese government in its relations with the United States. We believe such ties are important, for the mutual benefits they can bring to our two countries and economies certainly, but also for their contribution to creating an atmosphere in which we can continue to make progress across the broad range of our bilateral agenda, including POW/MIA accounting and human rights. Accordingly, in announcing normalization of diplomatic relations with Vietnam, the President stated that the USG would implement programs to develop trade with Vietnam "consistent with U.S. law." During his August visit to Hanoi, Secretary Christopher announced our intention to negotiate a trade agreement with Vietnam.

As a next step in our relationship, we have dispatched a fact-finding mission to Hanoi November 6-10 to explore possibilities for expanding economic relations. In addition to fact-finding, the delegation is educating the Vietnamese authorities on U.S. concerns and requirements attendant to expansion of economic ties, including a bilateral trade agreement, Jackson-Vanik freedom of emigration issues, worker rights, bilateral debt, and other economic topics.

We will continue to consult with Congress on the unfolding of normalization, and will be happy to provide debriefs on the delegation's trip following its return.