July 9, 2024

The Honorable Marc E. Knapper
U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam
7 Lang Ha Street
Hanoi, Vietnam

Dear Ambassador Knapper,

I write to you today regarding Nguyen Thuy Hanh, a human rights activist and prisoner of conscience.

On April 7, 2021, Nguyen Thuy Hanh, a former National Assembly candidate, was arrested by Vietnamese authorities for raising funds for the families of jailed prisoners of conscience. The Communist Party of Vietnam’s attempt to silence independent candidates and arrest individuals for offering financial support for families are all troublesome – as human rights are increasingly deteriorating in Vietnam.

Unfortunately, Nguyen Thuy Hanh has been in prison for over 3 years and her health is declining, as she was diagnosed with stage 2 cervical cancer in January. Since this diagnosis, she has had to undergo numerous rounds of chemotherapy and radiotherapy sessions at a local hospital. Nguyen Thuy Hanh should have never been arrested in the first place, but due to the excruciating therapy sessions and her continued detention, she should immediately be released from prison.

As you are aware, the side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy take a large toll on the human body. Conditions at the detention center are also extremely poor and it is inhumane for someone to have to suffer cancer under these terms including: a lack of adequate food and water. Nguyen Thuy Hanh should have the ability to both have quality care at the hospital and quality treatment outside of the operating room. Hence, Nguyen Thuy Hanh must be taken care of at home with her loved ones.

This growing pattern of detention is of great concern to the constituents I serve in California’s 45th Congressional District, which has the largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam. I worry the continued detention of ill prisoners of conscience will create a new precedent in a country with deteriorating freedoms.

The United States Embassy plays a pivotal role in public diplomacy and has a mission of supporting and protecting human rights defenders. I request that you use your diplomatic capabilities to assist in the release of Nguyen Thuy Hanh from Vietnamese detention so she can be treated fairly for her health conditions.

Sincerely,

Michelle Steel
Member of Congress