

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 29, 2014

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our serious concern regarding Vietnam's record on human rights, labor rights and religious freedom. In order for Congress to support a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement with Vietnam, it is critical that the Vietnamese government make dramatic improvements in its human rights practices, reform its laws to meet international labor standards and demonstrate a clear commitment to the rule of law.

Despite its election to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Vietnamese government has stepped up its crackdown against human rights advocates and people of faith. There have been reports of vicious beatings by the police against Hoa Hao Buddhists in the South, former prisoners of conscience in the North and other political and religious dissidents since early 2014.

According to the International Federation for Human Rights, "Vietnam has the highest number of political prisoners in Southeast Asia. It is estimated that there are at least 212 dissidents behind bars, and many more are under house arrest. Those imprisoned include lawyers, bloggers, land rights activists, Buddhist monks, journalists, writers, singers, labor activists, pro-democracy campaigners, and members of ethnic and religious minorities, including Hmong and Christian Montagnard. Many of Vietnam's political prisoners are women. Many of the dissidents are serving lengthy prison terms in poor detention conditions. As a result, their health is deteriorating and they are in need of urgent medical treatment and ongoing care."

While we are encouraged by the recent release of several Vietnamese prisoners of conscience, we cannot lose sight of the fact that these individuals had already been unjustly imprisoned for years for crimes such as "propaganda against the state" and "using democratic freedoms to injure the national unity." It is even more important to remember the hundreds of others who remain in prison and under other forms of detention for the peaceful exercise of their fundamental rights to expression, association, assembly and religion. Absent fundamental changes, these token few prisoner releases will not yield tangible improvements in the bleak human rights situation in Vietnam.

Without ensuring that concrete benchmarks on human rights are met at the outset, TPP would exacerbate the Vietnamese government's violations of human rights. The TPP should not be just another trade agreement. As the name implies, TPP will send a message to the world that its members regard each other as trusted "partners". TPP membership will inevitably be regarded as a badge of honor for these governments and represent a seal of approval from the United

States. That is why it is particularly important that TPP membership not be extended to governments that act against our most fundamental values.

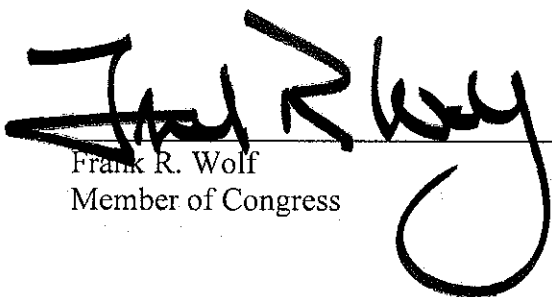
It will be difficult for the Congress to support a TPP agreement that includes Vietnam unless the following objectives have been fully met:

- The Vietnamese government should free all political prisoners and other prisoners of conscience. There are over 200 such prisoners known to human rights organizations – not including hundreds of religious prisoners from ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples in remote areas of the country.
- The Vietnamese government should repeal Decree 92 and end persecution of independent religious organizations. Decree 92, which took effect on January 1, 2013, prohibits religious activities unless they are registered and pre-approved by the government. Local authorities have reportedly used this decree to block religious organizations – other than those controlled by the government – from conducting any activities. The Vietnamese government should also end its requirement that religious organizations must be registered, approved and controlled by the government’s Committee for Religious Affairs.
- The Vietnamese government should respect international labor rights and allow Vietnamese workers to form labor unions that are truly independent of the government and of the Communist Party. Presently, Vietnam strictly prohibits free and independent labor unions and has jailed independent labor organizers. Without free and independent labor unions to protect workers and their rights, labor exploitation, forced labor and labor trafficking will certainly continue unabated.

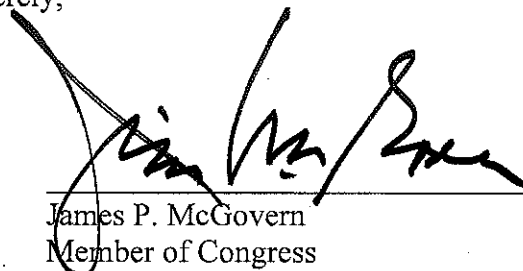
As you know, the United States is already insisting that Vietnam and other prospective partners make important changes in their commercial and regulatory practices as a precondition for TPP membership. The three additional conditions we propose, while not strictly commercial, embody the universal values that underlie our commitment to free trade and seek to ensure that the TPP will not have the unintended consequence of facilitating further contravention of these values. We hope you will agree that these conditions will make the partnership stronger.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the TPP will be a partnership that reflects America’s values on human rights, labor rights and religious freedom.

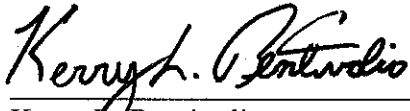
Sincerely,



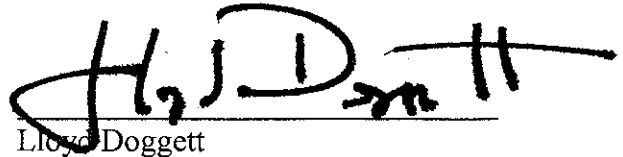
Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Kerry Bentivolio
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Paul C. Broun
Member of Congress



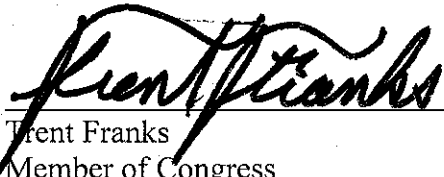
Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



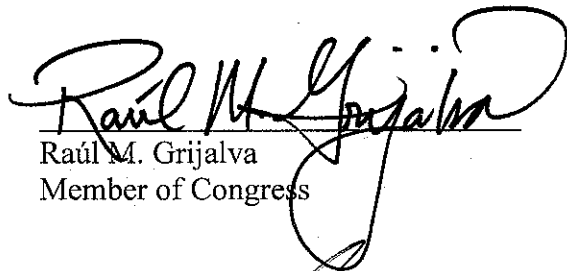
Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress



Gene Green
Member of Congress



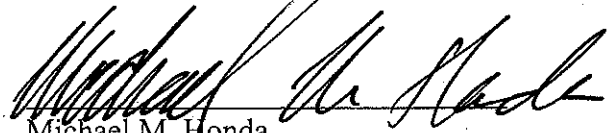
Trent Franks
Member of Congress



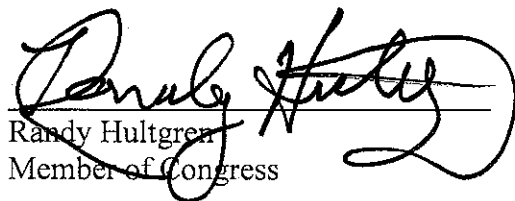
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



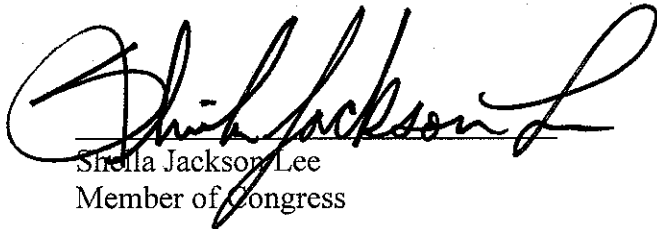
Christopher P. Gibson
Member of Congress



Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



Randy Hultgren
Member of Congress



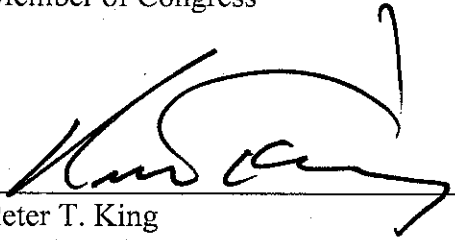
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress



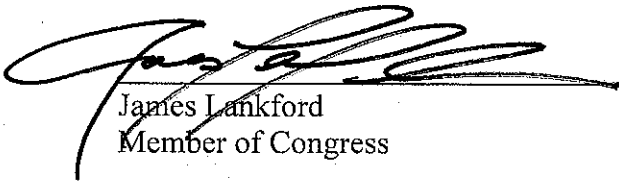
William R. Keating
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Peter T. King
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



James Lankford
Member of Congress



Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress



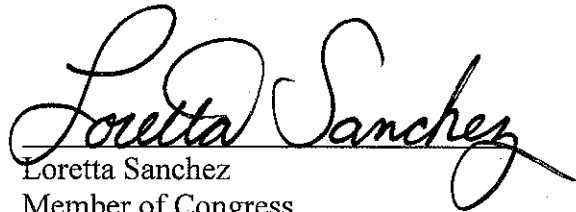
Pete Olson
Member of Congress



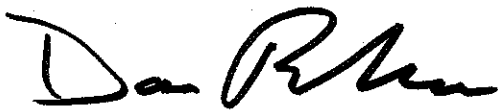
Nick J. Rahall, II
Member of Congress



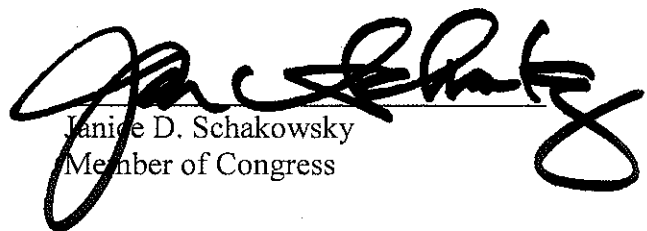
Robert Pittenger
Member of Congress



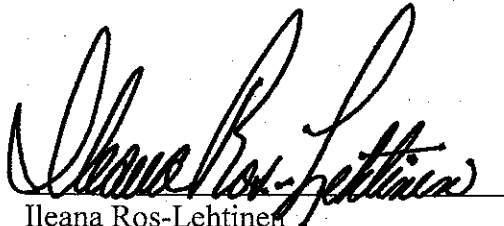
Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress

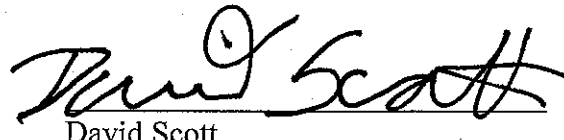


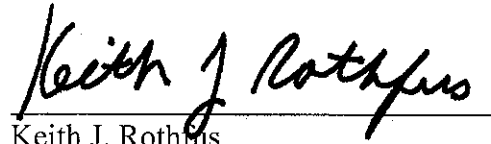
Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress

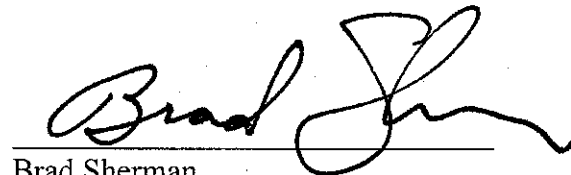


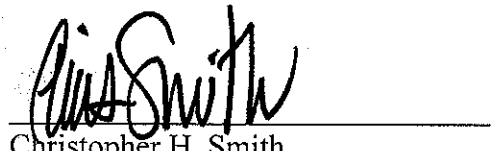
Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress



David Scott
Member of Congress


Keith J. Rothfus
Member of Congress


Brad Sherman
Member of Congress


Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress


Maxine Waters
Member of Congress


Rob Woodall
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