



Amnesty International

Group 524

May 2018



Next Meeting: Tuesday, May 15 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights

Vietnam: Alan Lowenthal Initiatives; Ted Osius Article

In the April issue, we reported the positive news that Congressman Alan Lowenthal of California had agreed to serve as a special congressional advocate for **Patriarch Thich Quang Do**. Lowenthal represents a district with a substantial Vietnamese American population, and since coming to Congress in 2013, he has been active on issues concerning Vietnam.

During April, as detailed on Page 3, Congressman Lowenthal met in Washington with Daniel Kritenbrink, the current U.S. ambassador to Vietnam. He also co-sponsored a bill that would authorize sanctions on Vietnamese officials who have been involved in human rights violations.

With Donald Trump in the White House, and his enablers in control of both House and Senate, this is a challenging time for human rights advocates – both inside and outside the government. Last year, when Ted Osius was still serving as the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, the Trump administration ordered him to meet with Vietnamese officials and persuade them to accept more than 8,000 refugees that Trump was planning to deport. The refugees came to the U.S. more than 40 years ago, at the time of the fall of Saigon.

Osius objected to the deportation order, and subsequently resigned from his post as ambassador. After reflecting on what happened, he recently published an article aimed primarily at his fellow Foreign Service officers. That article begins on Page 4.

Laos: Beginning 14th Year of Appeals for Release of Sing Chanthakoummane

In May 2005, our group accepted a case calling for the release of **Sing Chanthakoummane** from prison in Laos. You will find details of that case on Page 2, along with a model letter. During our May meeting, we will (as we do every month) sign a petition for Sing's release. We hope you can join us at the meeting!

Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m.
Meeting Location: Providence Heights
9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, PA 15101



Contact John Warren (jf.warren@verizon.net or 412-766-2506) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA website (www.amnestyusa.org) or the website of Amnesty International Group 39 (amnestypgh.org).



Laos: Model Letter Calling for Release of Sing Chanthakoummane

Here is a model letter in behalf of our group's Laotian prisoner, Sing Chanthakoummane. Please note that we are sending copies of our letters to the Laotian embassy in Washington. We began work on this prisoner case in the spring of 2005. Unlike many of the prisoner cases we have worked on, this individual is not considered to be a prisoner of conscience. As the letter makes clear, we are calling for his release solely on humanitarian grounds.

Prime Minister THONGLOUN Sisoulit
Office of the Prime Minister
Rue Sisavat
Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic
LAOS

Dear Prime Minister:

I wish to bring to your attention to the case of **Sing Chanthakoummane**, who was arrested in Laos in 1975 and has been detained ever since. He was arrested in 1975 for the purposes of "re-education," and he was held for 17 years without charge or trial.

In 1992, the Laotian government finally brought him to trial, along with two other men. **Sing Chanthakoummane** was charged with murder and other serious offenses, dating back to his years in the Royal Lao Army prior to 1975.

According to Amnesty International, the men were sentenced to life imprisonment following a trial that fell short of internationally recognized standards of justice. Of the three prisoners, two died many years ago. **Sing Chanthakoummane** remains alive, held in Prison Camp 7.

Amnesty International has taken no position on the innocence or guilt of this man, but it has nevertheless called on the Laotian government to free this elderly man on humanitarian grounds, based on the 43 years he has spent in prison, often under extremely harsh conditions. **Sing Chanthakoummane** apparently is the last individual detained for "re-education" who continues to be imprisoned.

As a supporter of Amnesty International, I am concerned about violations of human rights wherever they may occur. Whether in Albania or Zimbabwe, Laos or the United States, all governments are obliged to respect and protect the human dignity and human rights of their people. I urge you to bring about the immediate release – on humanitarian grounds – of **Sing Chanthakoummane**. Thank you for your consideration.

cc: Ambassador MAI Xaignavong
Embassy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic
2222 S Street, NW
Washington, DC 20008



Vietnam: Rep. Chris Smith Introduces Vietnam Human Rights Act

On April 25th, Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ) introduced the Vietnam Human Rights Act (HR 5621). The bill was referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Alan Lowenthal, who was one of five original co-sponsors, issued a press release which described the bill:

It would place financial and travel sanctions under the Magnitsky Act on Vietnamese abusers of human rights. It also calls for the release of political prisoners and a halt to the arrest of pro-democracy activists. It also provides for U.S. assistance to address Internet freedom, combat human trafficking, and support ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

The bill would also: designate Vietnam as a 'country of particular concern,' a designation reserved for nations guilty of particularly severe violations of religious freedom under the International Religious Freedom Act; call for the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia to be allowed to operate freely in Vietnam; and make any sales of U.S. military equipment or services to Vietnam conditional on improvements in human rights.

Enacted in 2012, the Magnitsky Act was mainly intended to punish Russian officials who were thought to be responsible for the death of Sergei Magnitsky, by prohibiting their entrance to the United States and their use of its banking system. Magnitsky, a prominent opponent of Putin, was arrested in 2008, and subsequently beaten to death in prison.

In 2016, Congress passed the Global Magnitsky Act, which made it possible to impose sanctions on foreign government officials implicated in human rights abuses anywhere in the world.

Vietnam: Alan Lowenthal meets with Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink

In late April, Ambassador Kritenbrink was back in Washington for a few days, and Congressman Lowenthal had the opportunity to meet with him for the first time. Afterwards, his office issued a press release, which included these paragraphs (emphasis added):

*I made sure that the Ambassador knew of my concerns and the concerns of my constituents about ongoing human rights abuses by the Vietnamese government, especially in the continuing arrest, detention, and severe sentencing of activists and religious figures. **I brought up specifically the cases of the Patriarch Thich Quang Do and Nguyen Van Dai. He said he hopes to visit with the Patriarch in the near future.***

On religious freedom, I expressed my appreciation to the Ambassador for the U.S. Consul General's recent visit to the Vietnamese Interfaith Council. I also encouraged State Department staff to continue to make regular visits and support the work of independent religious organizations and leaders.

We also spoke about the issue of deportations from the U.S. back to Vietnam of individuals who came to the U.S. from Vietnam before 1995. The Ambassador underscored that the U.S. Mission in Vietnam continues to work closely with Vietnamese authorities to address these issues.

As noted on Page 1, our former ambassador, Ted Osius, objected to the proposed deportations, and resigned from his position over that issue. See Page 4.



Ted Osius Discusses “Respect, Trust and Partnership”

This article by Ted Osius appeared in the April 2018 issue of The Foreign Service Journal. Ted Osius is the vice president of Fulbright University Vietnam. He served as U.S. ambassador to Vietnam from 2014 to 2017. A founding member of GLIFAA, he was a U.S. diplomat in Indonesia, India, Thailand, Japan, the Vatican and the Philippines, and worked on Asian challenges from the White House, the United Nations and the State Department.

Respect, Trust and Partnership: Keeping Diplomacy on Course in Troubling Times

When John Kerry swore me in as U.S. ambassador to Vietnam in 2014, I said it was a “dream come true” to be able to serve as America’s representative in a country I have loved for more than two decades.

A three-year tour as ambassador in Hanoi was the high point of my 30-year career in the Foreign Service and the honor of a lifetime. The high-water mark of that tour was hosting President Barack Obama during a history-making visit to Vietnam. In Ho Chi Minh City, one million people turned out to welcome him, and I knew we had done something right.

I am deeply grateful to the Foreign Service, not only for the privilege and joy of three decades of adventures (mostly in Asia), but also for my family. Thirteen-and-a-half years ago I met my future spouse in a business meeting of GLIFAA (formerly Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies), an employee affinity group. By extension the Foreign Service gave us our 4-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter.

A diplomatic career also allowed me the great privilege of serving something bigger than myself: the United States of America. So it was with mixed emotions that I decided in 2017 to resign and join a number of other senior Foreign Service officers headed for the exit. While each of us has a different reason for departing, many of my friends and former colleagues are deeply worried about the policy direction of the current administration, as am I. I fear that some policies are diminishing America’s role in the world, and decided that I could not in good conscience implement them.

Many of us who were determined to strengthen America’s role in Asia considered that abandoning the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement was a self-inflicted wound. America left the playing field to those who do not share our values, and left American jobs there, too. Others grieved the U.S. abdication of responsibility regarding climate change, especially in a year marked by multiple storms so immense that they are supposed to happen only once in 500 years. A large number of colleagues voiced their dissent regarding the so-called “Muslim travel ban,” abhorrent in a country whose true strength derives from its diversity. What happened to the nation that welcomed “your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free”?



Ted Osius Discusses “Respect, Trust and Partnership” (continued)

Closer to Home

And then the outrages came even closer to home. I was asked to press the government in Hanoi to receive from the United States more than 8,000 people, most of whom had fled South Vietnam on boats and through the jungle in the years immediately following the war.

The majority targeted for deportation—sometimes for minor infractions—were war refugees who had sided with the United States, whose loyalty was to the flag of a nation that no longer exists. And they were to be “returned” decades later to a nation ruled by a communist regime with which they had never reconciled. I feared many would become human rights cases, and our government would be culpable.

I assessed that this repulsive policy would destroy our chances of success in pursuing President Donald Trump’s other goals for relations with Vietnam: reducing the trade deficit, strengthening military relations and coping with regional threats to peace such as those emanating from North Korea.

I voiced my objections, was instructed to remain silent, and decided there was an ethical line that I could not cross if I wished to retain my integrity. I concluded that I could better serve my country from outside government, by helping to build a new, innovative university in Vietnam.

At a ceremony in the Treaty Room at State, with a portrait of Thomas Jefferson looking on, I had the opportunity to reflect on three decades of service, behind me the flags of countries where I had served as a junior-, mid-level and senior officer. My spouse, an African American man, stood at my side. Our children, Mexican-American, rode on our shoulders while Deputy Assistant Secretary Constance Dierman acknowledged the sacrifice of service, including the sacrifices that families make. My mentor of 26 years, Ambassador (ret.) Cameron Hume, presented a U.S. flag to my spouse.

I reminded the mentors, mentees, colleagues, friends and family members attending of what another departing diplomat, Tom Countryman, said at his retirement: “We [must be] firm in our principles, steadfast in our ideals, and tireless in our determination to uphold our oath—to ‘defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.’”

Now more than ever. The challenges to the Foreign Service, and to our democracy, are existential. Some who remain at State feel besieged and demoralized. Yet I urge those Foreign Service officers who believe in making a difference to remain, if possible, because it is still a privilege to serve our country. I continue to believe the experienced diplomat’s language, regional expertise and deep understanding of a global challenge will pay off, and give that individual the chance to change a bit of history.



Ted Osius Discusses “Respect, Trust and Partnership” (continued)

The Power of Respect

For those who choose to remain and who love diplomacy as I do, I offer a few thoughts on what can be done to best serve the United States, even in difficult times. I learned in my last three posts—India, Indonesia and Vietnam—about the power of respect, trust and partnership.

The United States casts a long shadow, and when we show respect it has a big impact. Showing respect means figuring out what is really, truly important to our partners, and taking that seriously. It costs America almost nothing and gets us almost everything.

Showing respect builds trust. Real, powerful partnership comes when you build trust. And you build trust by finding where interests converge, and then doing things together. The diplomat’s job is to find those shared interests and make them the bases of our actions. All those cables, all that contact work, the outreach—all of it should lead to action.

Here are three examples:

- India. India’s nuclear tests put it outside the nonproliferation regime. A real partnership was only possible if we ended the ostracism. So the United States showed respect and built trust by pursuing a civil-nuclear initiative with India.
- Indonesia. Indonesian special forces committed atrocities during the Suharto regime, so we didn’t engage them. A real partnership was only possible if we ended the ostracism. We showed respect and built trust with Indonesia by re-engaging with the special forces, while respecting international human rights norms.
- Vietnam. The war left massive scars. A real partnership was only possible if we dealt honestly with the past. We showed respect and built trust with Vietnam by pursuing the fullest-possible accounting of those lost, removing unexploded ordnance and cleaning up dioxin. And we were honest and respectful about even our most profound differences over human rights.

Building a Partnership

When I first visited Vietnam in 1996, the year after we normalized diplomatic relations, our countries could hardly envision a partnership. The past was a heavy burden, and the differences in our political systems were irreconcilable.

But Vietnam had, and still has, leaders who are committed to finding where interests converge and then doing things together. And the United States had leaders like Senator John McCain, former Secretary of State John Kerry and, later, President Obama, who were also committed to our comprehensive partnership.

So, together, our two countries deepened trade and security and people-to-people ties. During my tour as ambassador, we prepared for not one, but two presidential visits to Vietnam, as well as visits to the United States by Vietnam’s General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc.



Ted Osius Discusses “Respect, Trust and Partnership” (continued)

Building trust wasn't easy, because we had to keep earning it. We had to do what we said we'd do. For example, we promised the Vietnamese people we would continue cleaning up dioxin, also known as Agent Orange, left from the war.

Because the process for cleaning up dioxin is very expensive, it took three years to find the resources to remediate the largest, worst hot spot. That we are proceeding is a result of determined, persistent leadership spanning several administrations. And by keeping our promise, we strengthen trust, to the benefit of Vietnam, the United States and the world.

Respect and trust are not zero-sum, nor are they transactional. They involve relationships, not just money and power. Military dominance alone won't build the strong alliances and partnerships that we need in the Indo-Pacific region.

Those partnerships provide real, tangible benefits to the United States. Strong partnerships with India, Indonesia and Vietnam create jobs for Americans, contribute to regional stability and help us address global challenges to human health, the environment and international security.

When we commit to these partnerships—and I have seen this again and again—we facilitate commercial deals worth hundreds of billions of dollars and boost educational exchange, creating or supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in the United States. We form security partnerships with countries that share our interest in open sea lanes and upholding international law. We create a more prosperous and safer America.

Don't Give Up

Before leaving my post, I urged my embassy colleagues not to give up. Even if as ambassador (and therefore the president's personal representative) I could not in good conscience implement certain policies, I thought my younger colleagues might face a different choice.

Early in my career, I had considered leaving State when, serving on the Korea desk, I disagreed strongly with the administration's approach to North Korea. But I held on, believing that the pendulum would swing again and that I could do more good by remaining with the department than by quitting. There have been many difficult periods for the Foreign Service, and we have ridden through the ups and downs.

Now, from the perspective of a former FSO, I offer the following suggestions to those who continue to pursue diplomacy:



Ted Osius Discusses “Respect, Trust and Partnership” (continued)

- As long as you can remain true to your beliefs and ethics, don't give up. We've been through tough cycles before. This will end.
- Develop language and regional expertise. It continues to matter.
- Show respect in ways large and small. It matters when a representative of the United States—no matter what rank—shows respect.
- Build trust by engaging with counterparts in endeavors that are of mutual interest.
- Build partnerships based on respect, as they are essential for America's future and will enable us to recover when the clouds pass.
- Keep relationships going. Those who argue that only interests matter, and that relationships don't, have been proven wrong by history before and will be proven wrong again.

When the United States shows respect and builds trust, we build relationships that benefit enduring shared interests. After 30 years in Asia, I know that is the only way to make America even greater.