

Whitehouse Response "Vietnamese Rights and Wrongs..."

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Following a meeting in the White House with Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet, President George W. Bush said that the United States wants to have good relations with Vietnam. Noting that the United States and Vietnam have already developed good economic relations, President Bush also stressed the importance of a Vietnamese commitment to freedom, democracy and respect for human rights.

Trade between the U.S. and Vietnam reached nearly ten billion dollars last year. During President Triet's visit, representatives of the two countries signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement designed to open more markets and make bilateral trade and investment easier. President Triet said that in addition to increased cooperation on economic issues, the U.S. and Vietnam also have expanded cooperation in areas such as humanitarian issues, technology, education, and training.

At the same time, the U.S. remains deeply concerned by Vietnam's human rights record, especially its treatment of political dissidents. In recent months, the government of Vietnam has arrested or sentenced at least eight individuals for peacefully expressing their political opinions. President Bush said that he emphasized during his meeting with President Triet that respect for human rights is important in deepening the relationship between the United States and Vietnam:

"I . . . made it very clear that in order for relations to grow deeper that it's important for our friends to have a strong commitment to human rights and freedom and democracy. I explained my strong belief that societies are enriched when people are allowed to express themselves freely or worship freely."

Nguyen Dan Que is a leading Vietnamese dissident currently under house arrest for peacefully advocating human rights and democracy. He wrote in the Wall Street Journal newspaper that the Vietnamese Communist Party's ruling Politburo should "emerge from the dark ages" and embrace freedom, the rule of law, and universal human rights. "The Politburo must realize," he wrote, "that sixty-five percent of the [Vietnamese] population belongs to the postwar generation that does not accept the loss of their liberties and that the new generation, if unfettered, will join in rebuilding the economy and the nation."

"Freedom, says President Bush, is "the best way to unleash the creativity and economic potential of a nation" and "the only ordering of a society that leads to justice."