

# Rallying For Democracy

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## Dr. Nguyen Dan Que's Interview with Voice of America on December 18, 2007

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By Dr. Nguyen Dan Que

Q: As an advocate for human rights and democracy for many years, what are the political, economic events or cultural, social phenomena in Vietnam and overseas in 2007 that give you optimism about the prospect of democracy development in Vietnam in 2008?

A: The way I see it, 2007 had a number of events that bode well for the process of democratization in Vietnam:

- Vietnam's becoming a member of the World Trade Organization led to rapid increases in investment, especially foreign direct investment. FDI increased by 40% to 15 billion US dollars. Commerce also quickened, e.g., export to the U.S. reached 10 billion while import amounted to only 1 billion. In addition, overseas remittances reached 6 billion.

- A number of countries, including the U.S., increased scholarships and opportunities for training; exchanges in cultural, sports, art, literature also increased.

Hanoi behaved as if they have befriended the US government and intensified the oppression against democracy activists. Yet, the new US ambassador to Vietnam emphasized that human rights is his first priority. The actuality of US policy with Vietnam is: democracy accompanies economic development.

Increased trade with the U.S. and European Union will cause fundamental changes in Vietnam's social infrastructure and this new infrastructure will demand the appropriate supra-structure of governance, i.e., democracy.

On the Domestic Front:

With respect to the dynamics of Vietnam's society, I would like to underscore the bankruptcy of the so-called "development with socialist orientation." Indeed:

a) After joining WTO, market forces more and more dominate economic activities. Hanoi will soon have to open up the service sector in banking, telecommunications, information technology; foreign corporations can engage in export-import business or establish retail distribution networks inside Vietnam. As a result, such domination will be even more pronounced.

b) In economic reforms, Hanoi has single-mindedly pursued the index of gross domestic product (GDP) without paying adequate attention to human development. The educational system has systemic shortcomings leading to lack of human capital in the long run and making development unsustainable, uncompetitive.

Furthermore, even if the GDP could grow by 8% but if inflation is two-digit (at least 10%), the majority of the people will fare worse and only the minority of the rich and privileged can continue to abuse their power to live in luxury.

c) Most alarmingly, the income gap between rich and poor has reached crisis proportions. This disparity is the seed of social upheavals because of revolts by farmers, workers, and students:

- Farmers: They are "victims of injustices" who have been demonstrating to demand compensation but it is high time they stood up to take back their land.

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- Workers: There have been spontaneous strikes for better working conditions and living wages. There are now around 6 million Vietnamese workers in non-state enterprises, with 1 million in FDI firms. Thousands of strikes have taken place, with the number of workers increasing because the state-controlled unions normally side with employers.

- The Youth: Amounting to 65% of the Vietnamese population, they are Internet savvy, favoring progress and they have been active in Internet forums on issues such as demand for a progressive and liberal education, human rights, multiparty democracy, etc. They have been especially vocal against Hanoi's kowtowing and obsequious attitude against the Chinese annexation of the Paracel and Spratlys archipelagos.

On the International Front:

The trend toward democracy is still progressing, albeit with some difficulties. Examples include:

- After 47 years of existence, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) for the first time has a Charter with a provision to establish a Committee on Human Rights.

- What has been happening in Burma and the example of perseverance of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a great encouragement for us.

- Thailand and Pakistan are still on their way back to democracy.

- The Middle East is witnessing positive efforts towards economic development combined with a progressive political attitude with respect to democracy by the parties involved or related.

- China helped the U.S. in negotiating with North Korea to denuclearize the Korean peninsula with the hope that the U.S. will return the favor with respect to Taiwan.

- Anti-terrorism: All efforts have shown that the gap between the rich and the poor must be closed in each country so that the poor and the disenfranchised can develop and have hope for the future in a democratic environment.

In the United States, Vietnamese Americans have successfully informed the public and lobbied the US Government and Congress on the struggle for human rights and democracy in Vietnam. Significant achievements include:

- The President and Vice President of the United States of America met with 4 Vietnamese American human rights activists before the visit of Vietnam's State Head Nguyen Minh Triet.

- The political failure of Mr. Triet's visit was underscored by widespread criticism of US politicians against political oppression and violation of human rights in Vietnam.

- A number of US senators and representatives confirmed and passed relevant resolutions and legislation to support the democracy movement in Vietnam.

- Most recently, China publicized the diplomatic document that the late Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of communist Vietnam sent to then Premier Chu An Lai on September 14, 1958, that Vietnam "recognizes and supports the Declaration of the Government of the People's Republic of China on China's territorial sea." This treasonous act of sellout destroys the myth that Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Party are patriots who fought for territorial integrity of Vietnam. This helps tremendously the process of democracy in Vietnam.

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Above are some events and phenomena of 2007 that enable us to be optimistic about the future of our nation. I hope that 2008 will see a great harvest of democracy fruits in Vietnam.

Dr. Nguyen Dan Que  
Rally for Democracy  
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