

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 9, 2004

Secretary of State Colin Powell
US Department of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell:

On behalf of the US-Vietnam Congressional Caucus, we write to question the recommendation of "Country of Particular Concern" designation for Vietnam.

We feel that this designation is not warranted and religious issues are being confused with the mix of land rights disputes, ethnic tensions, autonomy goals, and the tension over the development of religious practices in Vietnam.

The US Embassy and Consulates in Vietnam have told us that they cannot verify many of the claims of violations of religious freedom. But, they are required to report every unconfirmed claim. In some instances, claims of religious freedom violations are confused with domestic insurrection, using religion as a cover. On this basis we urge you to reconsider the validity of the evidence.

While we support religious freedom in Vietnam, we also feel that progress should be taken into account. Some religious dissidents have recently been released and many laws restricting religious freedom have been amended. Further, the State Department has always said that people in Vietnam are allowed to practice their religion openly and are not discriminated against for their beliefs.

We regard this designation as detrimental to our bilateral relationship and hope that your decision is based upon proven facts and not just allegations. Relations between our two states have been advancing steadily and we feel another negative action by the US would only strengthen the position of the hard-liners in Vietnam. This does not serve our long term interests.

We appreciate your consideration on this issue.

All the best,



LANE EVANS
Member of Congress



ROB SIMMONS
Member of Congress

Cc: Under Secretary Richard Armitage
Members of the US-Vietnam Caucus