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December 15, 2010

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**Eni F.H. Faleomavaega**  
**Chairman**

**The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Washington, D.C.

**FALEOMAVAEGA ISSUES STATEMENT OF  
SUPPORT FOR VIETNAM**

The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, released a statement in opposition to H. Res. 20, calling on the State Department to list the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern" with respect to religious freedom. For historical purposes, Faleomavaega also included his statement in the Congressional Record. The full text of the Chairman's statement is included below.

"With reluctance, I rise today in opposition to H. Res. 20, calling on the State Department to list the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern" with respect to religious freedom," Faleomavaega said.

"While I fully understand the concerns reflected in H. Res. 20, this Resolution, which was introduced almost two years ago on January 6, 2009, is based on out-dated information that is not representative of Vietnam's progress."

"Also, a nearly identical provision, which was also flawed, already passed the House as part of H.R. 2410, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, which begs the question – why are we doing this again?"

“The passage of Resolutions has real-world consequences and impacts our relations with other countries. At a minimum, we should give thoughtful consideration to best ways forward and channel Resolutions through the Subcommittees of jurisdiction so that agreements on language can be reached before we take up these measures on the House floor.”

“Regrettably, this was not the case with this Resolution. The Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, which has broad jurisdiction for U.S. policy affecting the region, was bypassed for the sake of maintaining a 2-1 ratio of majority to minority suspensions, and our own U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, the Honorable Michael W. Michalak, was not consulted. While I realize that we represent separate branches of government, I believe Ambassador Michalak is in a better position than any of us to know where Vietnam stands in its progress regarding religious freedom.”

“Ambassador Michalak, in his remarks at the Human Rights Day Event held at the U.S. Embassy and American Center in Vietnam on December 9, 2010, stated:”

*Another area where over the past three years I have seen strong improvements is religious freedom where individuals are now largely free to practice their deeply felt convictions. Pagodas, churches, temples and mosques throughout Vietnam are full. Improvements include increased religious participation, large-scale religious gatherings -- some with more than 100,000 participants, growing numbers of registered and recognized religious organizations, increasing number of new churches and pagodas, and bigger involvement of religious groups in charitable activities. President Nguyen Minh Triet also met with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican, and Vietnam and the Holy See agreed to a Vatican appointment of a non-resident Representative for Vietnam as a first step toward the establishment of full diplomatic relations.*

*Ambassador Michalak also expressed some concerns, which I also share. He stated: However, some significant problems remain including occasional harassment and excessive use of force by local government officials against religious groups in some outlying locations. Specifically, there were several problematic high-profile incidents over the past year including where the authorities used excessive force against Catholic parishioners in land disputes outside of Hanoi at Dong Chiem parish and outside of Danang at Con Dau parish. These incidents call into question Vietnam's commitment to the rule of law and hurt Vietnam's otherwise positive image on religious freedom. Registration of Protestant congregations also remains slow and cumbersome in some areas of the country, particularly in the Northwest Highlands.*

“Even so, the U.S. Department of State has not found that these incidents rise to the level of listing Vietnam as Country of Particular Concern and I am confident that while recognizing and understanding the concerns reflected in the Resolution, the State Department will make a determination on CPC designation in keeping with the statutory requirements of the International Religious Freedom Act rather than in response to consideration, or passage, of this Resolution by the U.S. House of Representatives.”

“Despite isolated incidents which all of us oppose, Vietnam is a multi-religion country with all major religions present including Buddhism, Christianity, Protestantism and Islam. Vietnam boasts the second largest Christian population in Southeast Asia. Vietnam has

approximately 22.3 million religious followers, accounting for one fifth of the population and over 25,000 religious worship establishments.”

“According to Vietnam, so far the government has recognized 15 new religious organizations including 7 Protestant denominations, making the total of recognized religions 32. The State has assisted the publication of the Bible in 4 ethnic minority languages including Bana, Ede, Giarai and H’Mong, and facilitated the construction and reconstruction of over 1,500 religious establishments.”

“Vietnam has 4 Buddhist Academies, 32 Buddhist schools, hundreds of classes on Buddhism, 6 grand seminaries and one Protectionist Seminary. 1,177 religious leaders are actively participating in social management.”

“Vietnam Episcopal Council officials attended Ad-limina at the Vatican. Thousands of Catholic followers in Vietnam joined a range of activities to celebrate the 2010 Jubilee Year including 300 years of the presence of Catholicism and 50 years of the establishment of Catholic hierarchy in the country. In June, Vietnam and the Vatican agreed to promote the process of establishing diplomatic relations and the Pope agreed to appoint a “non-resident representative” of the Holy See for Vietnam.”

“The training and education of religious dignitaries and priests have been maintained and expanded. Throughout the country, there are around 17,000 seminarians and Buddhist monks and nuns are enrolled in religious training courses. The Vietnam Buddhist has 4 Buddhist Academies, of which the scale and training quality are being raised.”

“Thousands of Buddhist nuns and monks also gathered for the Great Buddhist Festival to mark the 1000th anniversary of Thang Long-Hanoi from July 27 to August 2, and Vietnam is actively preparing for the Summit of World Buddhism at the end of the year 2010.”

“In February 2009, the improvement of religious freedom in Vietnam was acknowledged by Vatican Undersecretary of State Monsignor Pietro Parolin, the Pope’s Envoy, during his visit to Vietnam, more than a month after H. Res. 20 was drafted and introduced. While I am no expert on Catholic relations with the Vietnamese government, I do believe we should seriously consider Monsignor Parolin’s views since he is better positioned to speak for and on behalf of the Catholic Church rather than Members of Congress whose information from third-parties may be distorted. For example, it is my understanding that some of the claims laid out in H. Res. 20 about the Catholic Church stem from land disputes and not religious disputes at all.”

“Regardless, the Catholic Church is moving forward in establishing better relations with Vietnam, as are the Buddhists, although H. Res. 20 also mischaracterizes Vietnam’s relationship with the Buddhists by singling out isolated incidents. If one were to single out the U.S. government’s mishandling of the Waco Siege in 1993, we might find ourselves at the receiving end of a Resolution like H. Res. 20 if other countries had chosen to take us to task when the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) failed to execute a search warrant at the Branch Davidian ranch at Mount Carmel, located nine miles east-northeast of Waco, Texas, at which time a siege was initiated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation which ended 50 days later with the death of 76 people, including more than 20 children.”

“This said, Vietnam recognizes it has work to do, and Vietnam is trying to improve its record on all fronts. Last month, I was in Hanoi where I met with H.E. Mr. Nguyen Van Son, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, and H.E. Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan, Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. We had serious discussions about religious freedom and I can assure my colleagues that there is a strong commitment on the part of the Vietnamese Government to respect and facilitate religious freedom, and the central government is working with the local government to bring about change.”

“Having visited Vietnam five times during my tenure as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, I have also personally worshipped in parishes with local Vietnamese and, in the case of my own Church, I can verify that the Government of Viet Nam has been very supportive of efforts of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as it seeks to establish official recognition in accordance with the laws of the land.”

“As a Member of The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), I am always reluctant to oppose any Resolution dealing with religious freedom because The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only religion in the United States against which an Extermination Order was issued sanctioning mass removal or death against American citizens. The Extermination Order was a military order signed by Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs on October 27, 1838 directing that the Mormons be driven from the state or exterminated.”

“On June 25, 1976, after some 138 years, Governor Christopher S. Bond, who is now a U.S. Senator, issued an executive order rescinding the Extermination Order, recognizing its legal invalidity and formally apologizing on behalf of the state of Missouri for the suffering it had caused the Latter-day Saints, and I thank Senator Bond for this.”

“Knowing the history of the LDS Church and the short-term and long-term consequences this forced exile of over 10,000 Later-day Saints had on those before and yet to come, I am firmly rooted in the belief that each of us should be allowed to claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.”

“So, while I agree in principle with speaking up for religious freedom and respect my colleagues who authored, co-sponsored, and who will vote in favor of this Resolution, in the case of H. Res. 20, I must oppose. This year, the U.S. celebrated 15 years of diplomatic relations with Vietnam. As one who served during the Vietnam War at the height of the Tet Offensive, I know we’ve come a long way and that Resolutions like this don’t serve to move us forward but may have the opposite effect when we fail to acknowledge sincere and measurable progress.”

“On the matter of human rights, I hope we will also consider that the U.S. cannot assume the moral high ground when it comes to Vietnam. From 1961 to 1971, the U.S. sprayed more than 11 million gallons of Agent Orange in Vietnam, subjecting millions of innocent civilians to dioxin – a toxic known to be one of the deadliest chemicals made by man. Despite the suffering that has occurred ever since, there seems to be no real interest on the part of the U.S. to clean up the mess we left behind. Instead, we spend our time offering up Resolutions like this which fails to make anything right. I believe we can and should do better and this is why I oppose H. Res. 20,” Chairman Faleomavaega concluded.

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