



2020 REPORT: ISSUES FACING VIETNAMESE DIASPORA IN AUSTRALIA

JULY 2020

**VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY
IN AUSTRALIA NSW**

**SUBMITTED BY:
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**Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate**
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Initially via email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

29 July 2020

Dear Committee Secretariat,

RE: Report on Issues Facing Vietnamese Diaspora in Australia

We wish to start by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to raise issues faced by the Vietnamese Diaspora in Australia. We sincerely appreciate the Committee for taking the time to read our submission.

We are a not-for-profit organisation and proudly represent Vietnamese Immigrants and Vietnamese Australians. Currently, more than 200,000 Australians claim Vietnamese ancestry, many whose family were forced to flee Vietnam after the Vietnam War ended on 30 April 1975, and re-settling across Australia.

While the Vietnamese community has been largely accepted as having successfully integrated into the wider Australian society, there are still many issues and barriers faced by individuals in the Vietnamese community, where more support is needed to address these challenges.

The two main areas of concern, which we will elaborate further below, include:

1. Social issues, such as, gambling, domestic violence, difficulty accessing services and re-settlement assistance due to language barriers;
2. Protection of Human Rights of Vietnamese-Australians abroad, particularly, 71 year old Australian Citizen, Chau Van Kham, who is currently imprisoned in Vietnam, serving a 12 year sentence for exaggerated charges, without adequate access to legal advice and medical assistance.

We are often the first point of contact for assistance and information by people in the Vietnamese community and we could not do this without help from our volunteers. However, we need more resources and funding in order to continue to provide these services and meet the demand.



PART 1: SOCIAL ISSUES

In this section we will address the following terms of reference:

- *Support offered to diaspora community associations and similar organisations, including government grants and other funding*
- *Barriers to the full participation of diaspora communities in Australia's democratic and social institutions and mechanisms for addressing these barriers*

We are approached by many who have gambling addictions, suffered domestic violence or due to language barriers, need our help so they can access other services, including re-settlement assistance.

Currently, our organisation does not receive any government grants or funding in these key problem areas and funding is sought.

Gambling

Gambling remains a serious issue in the Vietnamese community, affecting many individuals and their families. The 2016 AGRC Discussion Paper by Marissa Dickins and Anna Thomas found people from ethnic communities are more likely to develop gambling addiction compared with the rest of the Australian population.

The study found cultural factors and migration stressors contributed to the increased likelihood of developing gambling problems, where cultural norms and superstitious beliefs led to higher risk-taking.

Tailored counselling and culturally specific services are required to address the underlying issues, especially since the problems are further exacerbated due to:

- i. language barriers making it more difficult to access mainstream counselling services, yet enhance the appeal to gamble due to social isolation;
- ii. stigma within the Vietnamese culture, where there are people who are afraid to ask for help for fear of losing face/reputation.

Insufficient research has been undertaken to date and minimal services are currently available specifically for Vietnamese people in the community with gambling problems. Funding is sought from the Australian government which will increase resources available and greatly assist the Vietnamese Community to provide adequate assistance through:

- i. Counselling with a Vietnamese-speaking counsellor for individuals and their family to develop strategies to break the cycle of gambling, such as, financial management, addressing any psychological issues that led to gambling;
- ii. Campaigns and programs to breakdown the stigma of seeking help and to recognise the early signs of a gambling problem before it leads to addiction, spiralling indebtedness or worse,



committing a crime, such as domestic violence against their own family or drug offences to repay their debt.

Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence remains a prevalent issue in the Vietnamese community, and urgent funding is sought to boost efforts in assisting victims access services and alternative accommodation. Many have endured lengthy periods of abuse, where those who come to seek assistance is only the tip of the iceberg. Many cases are unreported for a number of reasons, such as, fear of the police, financial dependence on the abuser, or fear that their Visa could be affected. It is also not uncommon in the Vietnamese culture for victims to believe it is culturally acceptable or to blame themselves, or feel guilty if their partner/spouse was to get in trouble. We also hope to develop strategies and programs to reach more victims of domestic violence.

Re-settlement Assistance

We also have many inquiries from recently arrived Vietnamese migrants, who often have language barriers that impede their full participation in Australia's democratic and social institutions and mechanisms. They seek our help to assist with services such as, filling out Australian Citizen Applications, enrolling to vote, enrolling in English classes, referring them where they can obtain advice on: migration, law, employment/career. The Vietnamese Community does not currently have specific funding for re-settlement programs and seeks the government to allocate funding in this area so that we can further assist migrants integrate and participate in the Australian community to their full capacity.

PART 2: HUMAN RIGHTS

In this section we will address the following term of reference:

- *Safety concerns among diaspora communities, and means for strengthening the protection and resilience of vulnerable groups*

The Vietnamese community living in Australia are privileged to enjoy civil liberties and democratic freedoms that are not enshrined in our homeland, Vietnam. In Australia, we are entitled to freedom of speech, freedom to express our political views, freedom to associate, without fear of persecution. Under the Communist Vietnamese regime, the freedoms we take for granted are grossly curtailed, where fellow countrymen are persecuted, tortured, imprisoned for exercising their human rights. There are unspeakable human rights abuses, arbitrary arrests with unfair trials, stealing land from their own citizens without monetary compensation.

There are countless prisoners of conscience in Vietnam, including, Australian Citizen, Chau Van Kham, who was arrested in January 2019, convicted through court trial without due process and was sentenced to an unjust 12 year prison term for offences that are highly embellished and disproportionate, as punishment for his association with a human rights organisation in Australia. This



is extremely concerning and we hold grave fears for his safety and his ailing health with his advanced age. Consular visits were denied after the final appeal and it was not until the end of June 2020, when Australian Consular were informed where he was located and a visit was allowed, where previous visits, was supervised and recorded by prison guards.

We appreciate the efforts in facilitating the recent visit between Chau Van Kham and his family member, however, communication with the outside world remains non-existent and the Vietnamese government has time and time again denied Consular visits for months on end. We strongly call for more action by the Australian government to bring Mr. Chau home to Australia. The Australian government must have more direct communication with Vietnam to request for Mr. Chau's immediate release and should publicly condemn the unfair detention and lack of due process to show that Australia strongly opposes Vietnam's actions. We must protect our own citizens against inhumane treatment. Over ten thousand people have already signed an online petition calling for Mr. Chau's release.

Australia as a democratic society has an international obligation to do more to stand up against totalitarian regimes and hold countries, like Vietnam, accountable for their human rights abuses. The government should use occasions such as the Bilateral Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue to speak up about Vietnam's shameful track record with human rights, request the release of political prisoners and call out Vietnam for turning a blind eye to China's bullying tactics against fellow countrymen in the Indo-Pacific Ocean.

Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere. Australia cannot turn a blind eye to its own Citizens being denied basic human rights.

CONCLUSION

We thank the Committee for taking valuable time to carefully read through our report. We appreciate the opportunity you have provided for us to raise issues faced within the Vietnamese community and anticipate we can work together to address these challenges. It is opportunities like this, which allows our voice to be heard at the government level and strengthens dialogue.

We will continue to co-operate with the government, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic, where we promptly pass on government announcements and information to the Vietnamese community.

Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss this report further.

We look forward to your favourable response to our report and thank you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,



Paul Huy Nguyen
B.Com, CPA, CTA, JP.
President VCA NSW Chapter.



Additional Information on Chau Van Kham

From Human Rights

change.org

Help release Australian human rights ad...

Petition details Comments Updates

Help release Australian human rights advocate Chau Van Kham from the Vietnamese Government

10,685 have signed. Let's get to 15,000!

Watch:

Online Petition:



Link to online petition: <https://www.change.org/p/help-release-australian-human-rights-advocate-chau-van-kham-from-the-vietnamese-government>