

August 27, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, D.C., 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It is with deep respect yet regret that we write this letter to your office. As Councilmembers in the City of San Jose, the city that holds the distinction of being home to the largest concentration of Vietnamese outside of the country of Vietnam, we find ourselves in the strongest possible disagreement with your recent efforts to deepen ties with the communist regime in Vietnam while neglecting pressing issues of freedom, democracy, and human rights. Not only has the communist regime in Vietnam continued a reign of tyrannical despotism where oppression and human rights violations are more flagrant than even ten to twenty years ago, but to add insult to injury, our adopted home country has tacitly consented to these actions in Hanoi for unknown gain.

When U.S. Ambassador Ted Osius visited San Jose a month ago he further betrayed our values by displaying a symbol of the Hanoi Communist Red Flag on his lapel while forbidding the Vietnamese Freedom (Yellow) Flag to be photographed with him. At all three of his events in northern and southern California, Mr. Osius explained that he would lose his job if seen with the Yellow Flag.

As a result of Mr. Osius' instruction regarding his disdain for the Yellow Flag, a staff member organizing the event at San Jose City Hall forced a respected Vietnamese activist to remove her lanyard featuring the US flag and the Vietnamese Yellow Flag. This Yellow Flag, like our own U.S. Flag, is a symbol of freedom. It is a symbol that to so many in the Vietnamese community represents the struggle against totalitarianism and the sacrifice of so many against overwhelming odds.

The Ambassador's blatant disregard for the values of Vietnamese-Americans shows his lack of both leadership and courage. We cannot allow foreign pressure to weaken our resolve. The job that Mr. Osius holds is not to appease tyrants, but to represent the values of the United States and the will of its people.

He has, for all the reasons stated above, severely strained the relationship between Vietnamese-Americans and their government. This makes substantive engagement inherently difficult, unless corrective action is taken.

Very Respectfully Yours,



Manh Nguyen
Councilmember



Tam Nguyen
Councilmember

cc: John Kerry, U.S. Secretary of State
Ted Osius, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam
Diane Feinstein, U.S. Senator
Barbara Boxer, U.S. Senator
Mike Honda, U.S. Representative
Zoe Lofgren, U.S. Representative
Anna Eshoo, U.S. Representative