



Speech by

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THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (11.21 p.m.): On 2 May I attended the inauguration ceremony of the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple at Durack. That morning, over 1,000 people visited the temple to celebrate this event. Buddhism is the principal religion of the Vietnamese people. In fact, it is the religion of at least 80% of Australian Vietnamese.

The Chua Phap-Quang Temple was constructed over the past two years through the efforts of a committed group of people. Vegetarian dinners were held to raise funds for Phap-Quang's construction, and these efforts were always supported by more than 1,000 Buddhists, compatriots and friends. The temple's activities do not only fulfil the religious needs of the community but they also provide social, cultural and educational support for the Vietnamese community. This helps to maintain valuable traditions and spiritual guidance to the Vietnamese people in a new country.

The official opening ceremony was attended by 30 venerable monks and nuns from other Australian States and New Zealand. Distinguished guests included the Honourable Henry Palaszczuk, the member for Inala; Councillor Les Bryant; and Lord Mayor Jim Soorley. After the ceremony commenced, Thich Dhat Ton, the President and Abbot of Phap-Quang Temple, gave the opening speech. He spoke of temples being symbols of Buddhism—places for people to come to practise Buddhism, to develop their inner morality, create inner tranquillity and thus contribute to the advancement of all human beings.

The construction of the temple and the many people who contributed towards making their vision a reality was to me an example of the nature and cohesiveness of this community. The colourful beauty of the temple is also symbolic and defines the richness of their culture, their elegance and bright outlook on the future.

Over the past few years, I have participated in many Vietnamese events, and each time I do I learn something new about their way of life. Recently, at a forum held by the Office of Multicultural Affairs for people in the south-western suburbs, I again met some of the leaders of this and other ethnic communities. Although the forum was to gain information about the needs of these communities to further advance the direction of the office, the underlying concern of participants was racism and how this may be overcome. Some of the common words used were integration, acceptance, education, peace and harmony. To live in a society free of prejudice and fear is the ultimate aim of all new Australians. Even though language barriers certainly existed, I felt that the intention of what the people wanted to express came through loud and clear. This is typical of this community: to be successful in speaking out and in getting their message across.

In all cultures there are the heroes—those with a clear vision of what is right and those who have set about fighting injustices. Professor Doan Viet Hoat is one of the most remarkable people in regard to advocating on behalf of the people of Vietnam. Professor Doan has dedicated his life to fighting for freedom and democracy in Vietnam. He spent 19 years in Vietnamese prisons for advocating peaceful political reform, liberty and human rights. Finally, on 29 August 1998—less than a year ago—this dedicated individual was released from prison and immediately was expelled from his home country. His release occurred as a result of immense pressure put on the Government by international human rights organisations. He will be visiting Brisbane on 30 and 31 May to personally express his appreciation to the Queensland Government.

Professor Doan Viet Hoat is a man revered by his compatriots, and his writings attest to his great vision, independent thinking, his immunity to hatred, and his great wisdom and courage. It is people such as Professor Doan who change the course of our history, despite the consequences, by fighting for what they believe in. I look forward to meeting him and hearing first-hand his thoughts on human rights issues, just as I look forward to working with all cultures with the aim of promoting a society that is free, safe and harmonious and where the colour of one's skin does not matter.