



Speech by

Mr S. SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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PROFESSOR DOAN VIET HOAT

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (11.52 p.m.): Recently, I had the honour of meeting Amnesty prisoner of conscience Professor Doan Viet Hoat, who visited Queensland in May as part of a tour of Australia to visit Vietnamese groups here. Professor Doan is a distinguished academic who is arguably one of the most remarkable and dedicated advocates for freedom and democracy in his home country. Our meeting at Parliament House—the central focus of our robust democracy in this State—provided me with a great insight into the many problems Vietnamese democrats have historically faced in their dealings with the Hanoi Government.

At our meeting, which included my colleague the member for Moggill and Leader of the Liberal Party, Professor Doan personally expressed his appreciation for the people of Queensland's interest in his country and in the problems of those who fall foul of the Government there. He gave us some very useful and, in some instances, tragic insights into human rights issues as they apply in Vietnam. Professor Doan has first-hand experience of the penalties that used to apply to people in Vietnam who attracted the unwelcome attentions of the Government there. Regrettably, some of the ill-effects are still in place in Hanoi Government policy as it applies to dissent and public expressions of desire for democracy.

Professor Doan was first arrested in August 1976, when he was accused of anti-revolutionary activities against the socialist regime. He was not brought to trial but, nevertheless, spent 12 years in jail. In 1990, two years after his release, he was re-arrested, this time on charges of undertaking counter-revolutionary activities against the Government. At the end of a two-day trial, he was sentenced to five years' jail, and Professor Doan says that during these years he was subjected to

hard labour in camps with inadequate food and medicine and in unhygienic living conditions.

Due to the great pressure exerted on the Vietnamese Government by international human rights organisations and the Governments of several countries, Professor Doan was released in August 1998 and immediately expelled from Vietnam. He lives in the United States with his family, but travels extensively to speak to Vietnamese communities worldwide and to thank them for their support in his fight for dissidents still in Vietnam.

Anything that we here in Queensland can do in a practical way to promote freedom and democracy in Vietnam or, indeed, anywhere should, of course, be done. It is particularly important for us in Queensland to keep in mind the fact that Vietnamese at home in Vietnam—in stark contrast to those who have made their home in Queensland—are subject to police and other authoritarian action that is repressive and which flies in the face of our concept of freedom of expression and political views. It is, of course, also important that we keep in mind the sovereign right of nations to pursue national policies that they define as being in their interest, and also that we do not expect—far less demand—foreign nations to adopt the full swag of democratic mechanisms we here regard as a vital part of our national life.

That said, prisoners of conscience everywhere are deserving of the greatest support and the attentions of Governments and their officials whenever bringing pressure to bear might have a happy result. In the case of Professor Doan, it seems international pressure has demonstrated how effective such action can be when used sensibly and with polite force.

It is unconscionable that an academic as well qualified as Professor Doan, whose pursuit of the

goal of greater freedoms for his people can only be viewed as laudable, should have been made to suffer so grievously for his conscience. I am sure that Queenslanders everywhere will applaud Professor Doan's courage in facing great adversity over nearly three decades. I know that he is highly valued by the Vietnamese community in Queensland as an individual who has a very profound message for oppressed people everywhere.
