

113TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 592

Recognizing the contributions of the Montagnard indigenous tribespeople of the Central Highlands of Vietnam to the United States Armed Forces during the Vietnam War, and condemning the ongoing violation of human rights by the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 1, 2014

Mr. BURR submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the
Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the contributions of the Montagnard indigenous tribespeople of the Central Highlands of Vietnam to the United States Armed Forces during the Vietnam War, and condemning the ongoing violation of human rights by the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Whereas the Montagnards, sometimes referred to as “Dega”, are the indigenous tribespeople living in Vietnam’s Central Highlands region;

Whereas the Montagnards were driven into the mountains by invading Vietnamese and Cambodians in the 9th century;

Whereas French Roman Catholic missionaries converted many of the Montagnards in the 19th century and Amer-

ican Protestant missionaries subsequently converted many to various Protestant sects;

Whereas, during the 1960s, the United States Mission in Saigon, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and United States Army Special Forces, also known as the Green Berets, trained the Montagnards in unconventional warfare;

Whereas an estimated 61,000 Montagnards, out of an estimated population of 1,000,000, fought alongside the United States and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces against the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong;

Whereas the Central Intelligence Agency, United States Special Forces, and the Montagnards cooperated on the Village Defense Program, a forerunner to the War's Strategic Hamlet Program and estimated 43,000 Montagnards were organized into "Civilian Irregular Defense Groups" (CIDGs) to provide protection for the areas around the CIDGs' operational bases;

Whereas, at its peak, the CIDGs had approximately 50 operational bases, with each base containing a contingent of two United States Army officers and ten enlisted men, and an ARVN unit of the same size, and each base trained 200 to 700 Montagnards, or "strikers";

Whereas another 18,000 Montagnards were reportedly enlisted into mobile strike forces, and various historical accounts describe a strong bond between the United States Special Forces and the Montagnards, in contrast to Vietnamese Special Forces and ARVN troops;

Whereas the lives of thousands of members of the United States Armed Forces were saved as a result of the heroic

actions of the Montagnards, who fought loyally and bravely alongside United States Special Forces in the Vietnam War;

Whereas, after the fall of the Republic of Vietnam in 1975, thousands of Montagnards fled across the border into Cambodia to escape persecution;

Whereas the Government of the reunified Vietnamese nation, renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, deeply distrusted the Montagnards who had sided with the United States and ARVN forces, and subjected them to imprisonment and various forms of discrimination and oppression after the Vietnam War ended;

Whereas, after the Vietnam War, the United States Government resettled large numbers of Montagnards, mostly in North Carolina, and an estimated several thousand Montagnards currently reside in North Carolina, which is the largest population of Montagnards residing outside of Vietnam;

Whereas the Socialist Republic of Vietnam currently remains a one-party state, ruled and controlled by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), which continues to restrict freedom of religion, movement, land and property rights, and political expression;

Whereas officials of the Government of Vietnam have forced Montagnards to publicly denounce their religion, arrested and imprisoned Montagnards who organized public demonstrations, and mistreated Montagnards in detention;

Whereas the Government of Vietnam's restrictions on foreigners' access to the Central Highlands region complicate accurate reporting of human rights violations against the Montagnards, including the hundreds of

Montagnards who have reportedly been imprisoned since 2001 and Montagnards who have fled to Thailand seeking asylum in a third country;

Whereas some Montagnard Americans have complained that Vietnamese authorities either have prevented them from visiting Vietnam or have subjected them to interrogation upon re-entering the country on visits;

Whereas the Department of State's 2013 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and 2013 International Religious Freedom Report reference the mistreatment of Montagnards as an example of the detention of ethnic minorities in Vietnam and references reports from followers of the unsanctioned Church of Christ that local authorities in the Central Highlands provinces had harassed and persecuted them;

Whereas, in March 2014, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) submitted an alternative report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights summarizing the alleged violations of the economic, social, and cultural rights of Vietnam's Montagnard, Hmong, and Khmer Krom;

Whereas the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization report states that the Government of Vietnam has denied Montagnards of their right of self-determination; imposed discriminatory policies; curtailed religious freedom; impeded access to an adequate standard of living; limited access to health care and education; infringed on the Montagnards' cultural rights; and, in two recent cases, arrested and imprisoned Montagnards purportedly for their religious beliefs;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2014 Annual Report states that the Government of Vietnam controls all religious activities through law and administrative oversight, severely restricts independent religious practice, and represses individuals and religious groups it views as challenging its authority, including independent Protestant house churches in the Central and Northwest Highlands; and

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recommends that Vietnam be designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and that access to Priority 1 refugee resettlement authority should be increased for individuals from Vietnam facing a well-founded fear of persecution: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) recognizes the contributions of the
3 Montagnards who fought loyally and bravely with
4 United States Armed Forces during the Vietnam
5 War and who continue to suffer persecution in Viet-
6 nam as a result of this relationship;

7 (2) condemns actions taken by the Government
8 of Vietnam to suppress basic human rights and civil
9 liberties for all its citizens;

10 (3) urges the Government of Vietnam to allow
11 human rights groups access to all regions of the
12 country and to end restrictions of basic human
13 rights, including the freedom of religion, land and

1 property rights, freedom of movement, and access to
2 an adequate standard of living; and

3 (4) urges the President and Congress to develop
4 policies that support Montagnards and other
5 marginalized ethnic minority and indigenous popu-
6 lations such as the Khmer Krom and the Hmong in
7 Vietnam and reflect United States interests and
8 commitment to upholding human rights and democ-
9 racy abroad.

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