

*Some letter went
to E. Dole & Bush.*

March 7, 2007

The Honorable Congressman Howard Coble
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3306

Dear Congressman Coble

On behalf of the congregation of Guilford College United Methodist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, I wish to advise you of a matter of major humanitarian concern and request your timely assistance.

Since 2002, our church has been deeply involved in Montagnard refugee assistance. We sponsor two families and all the family members related to our church have been an extreme blessing to this faith community.

Our Mission Commission have consistently encountered and learned of concrete instances of persecution and abuse of the Montagnard people by the Vietnam government. Recent conditions within the United Nations HCR camps in Cambodia as well as in the Vietnam highlands reflect: intimidation tactics, manipulation and coercion through physical, psychological, economic and religious persecution. In Vietnam, examples of punishments included: beatings, imprisonment, torture, destruction of crops, denial of freedom to worship, and even missing persons unaccounted for. (see attachment)

In March of 2006, after two years and eight months delay by Vietnam, two daughters, ages 8 and 10 were released to their parents who had escaped Vietnam in 2001. This is one of our supported families. Four more relatives are in the UN Camp, and have been since January 2007. The pressure for them to return to Vietnam has been unbearable, and their lives have been threatened.

We can not ignore facts and continue in this inhumane treatment of these peoples. We take serious issue with the United States government's decision to remove Vietnam from the list of countries that practice religious persecution. We can not accept Ambassador John Hanford's statement calling Vietnam "a model of progress." The Lutheran Family Services, World Relief, Catholic Family Services, Save The Montagnards People, Inc, UMCOR, and the Jewish Family Services, all join in strongly disagreeing with Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey's claims of openness and freedom for these people. (see attachment)

We, as a congregation, appeal to you to resolve the concerns we have expressed as a faith community actively involved in this Montagnard resettlement. Please consider in your actions this week-end the following suggestions:

- Ensure the UNHRC camps employ monitors who are language fluent in Montagnard language, non-communist, fair and humane.
- Allow telephone communication in the UNHCR camps and in the highlands of Vietnam.
- Challenge statements and positions by our government representatives that violate national credibility and integrity.
- Listen with your heart to these people's stories.

Thank you for your many contributions to our great country and to worldwide humanitarian efforts to make our world a better and safer place for all peoples.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Carol Williams-Gilbert
Guilford College United Methodist Church

CWG/cr