

**Statement of Ms. Vũ Phương-Anh, a victim of the human trafficking condoned by the Vietnamese government**

Before the House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights  
January 24, 2012

Thank you for allowing me to be here today and to listen to my story.

First, I wanted to extend my thanks to Congressman Smith, Congressman Wolf, the State Department, IOM, BPSOS, and all the others who played a role in rescuing me and the other victims who shared my fate. I came today to speak for all of us victims, including hundreds who do not have a voice.

Second, although I would like to publicly name some of the US companies who caused this pain to me and my colleagues in my testimony today, I have been advised against this since it could affect my lawyer's strategy in seeking justice. I am also working with the students at the Human Trafficking Clinic at the South Texas College of Law in Houston, Texas, and Lawyers Against Human Trafficking, who are assisting me.

As a Hmong, a minority ethnic group in Vietnam, I grew up in poverty in Lao Cai Province. Being Catholic compounded my family's difficulties in making a living. Vietnam's government follows a policy of persecuting Christian Hmong people. My parents have only two children, my sister and I. We left school early – I completed only the fifth grade – because our parents needed help. When I was 16, my sister who 3 years older, was kidnapped and has not been found to this day. We believe that she was sold in China.

Heeding the Vietnamese government's call for citizens' participation in its labor exports program under the policy of "eradicating hunger and reducing poverty," I signed up and paid an exorbitant fee for Chinese lessons (even though I already spoke Chinese) and other travel fees (in total that cost me over 5 years of wages.) In early 2008 I was brought to Jordan to work in a sewing factory operated by a Taiwanese contractor, whom I later discovered was a third party agent of several large US companies. I had been promised an 8-hour workday and a monthly salary of \$300, which was huge! It was only a few hours before our plane left Vietnam, that we were given contracts to sign – by then we had already borrowed money from Vietnam's state-owned banks and private loan sharks in order to pay the large fees, and could not turn back. A number among us had applied for work in Brunei or Taiwan, but ended up in Jordan. Many could not read the contracts as they were in foreign languages to us.

Upon landing in Jordan, my employer kept all of my papers and had me start working that same day, without any rest. There were 271 of us Vietnamese workers, living in a dormitory on company grounds. We produced outfits for two American firms because I saw the logos with their names on the clothes and labels that we were sewing.

I worked from 7:30 a.m. until midnight everyday. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day, they paid me \$10 for the entire ten day period -- \$1 for each 15-16 hour day that I worked. I was furious and upset.

Then I realized that all of us had been deceived. We were already indebted to the labor-export companies for over \$2,000 to \$2,500 per worker (compare that exorbitant amount to each of our annual income in Vietnam of a few hundred US dollars).

On February 10, the Lunar New Year's Day, we went on strike to demand our employer to pay us as our contract stipulated. He responded by stopping the provision of food and cutting off power and water to our dormitory. That lasted for 10 days at the end of which, he gave us an ultimatum, threatening dire punishment if we persisted in not working. A number of us were intimidated and resumed work. However, most of us -- 176 of us -- continued to strike until the employer paid us what he owed us.

On February 19, Ms. Vũ Thu Hà, a representative of the Vietnamese labor-export companies, entered our dormitory room with security guards and began to assault us females who were already weakened and sick for lack of food. I saw with my own eyes beefy guards pulling Kim Anh, who was bedridden, from her upper bunk, throwing her to the ground, with her head hitting the side of the bed. I also saw guards pulling unconscious Đoàn Thị Ngọc by her hair like pulling a dead animal. (Photo: Trần Thị Ánh)

The guards used their batons on us without mercy. Their batons left a scar on my head because they attacked me when I used my cell phone to record the horrific scene. We had to break the glass pane of a window and screamed for help from outside, but we had no luck.

Jordanian police showed up some time later. Our initial feeling of relief was shattered when policemen started to beat us with their batons, inflicting several injuries and causing some of us to pass out, and scaring all of us. Our employer stood there and did nothing. He continued to withhold food from us. We had to sell our personal belongings, including hygiene pads, to buy instant noodles for those who were gravely ill. We raised less than \$10.

I was able to get word out to a newspaper in Vietnam. A few days later, one of us received a call from Dr. Nguyễn Đình Thắng of BPSOS who had read that article. After hearing about our plight, he sent \$3,000 to sustain us for a while.

On February 27, following his advice, a small group of us stealthily left the dormitory and reported the situation to a nearby office of the Jordanian Labor Ministry. Within a few hours, a delegation from IOM and the Labor Ministry came. The IOM physician examined wounded workers and sent 5 to emergency care. After the group left, our employer continued to confine us to the dormitory. They fed us, but very inadequately. Ms. Vũ Thu Hà, the representative of the Vietnamese labor-export companies kept watch. (Photo: IOM personnel examining sick and wounded Vietnamese workers)

On March 10, the Vietnamese government sent a joint-agency delegation to Jordan. Mr. Trần Việt Tú, Vice Consul General for Egypt led the group that included officials of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and also the managers from the labor-export companies. Mr. Tú and Mr. Trương Xuân Thành, Vice-Director of the Consular Office in MOFA (now Consul General in Frankfurt, Germany), looked for me among the workers. They accused me of being reactionary and

accepting money from overseas NGOs, and said that they will have me taken back to Vietnam to face punishment. They also asked the rest of us to resume work (Photo: the delegation sent by Vietnam's government and Ms. Vũ Thu Hà, the person who led the Jordanian security guards during the assault on Vietnamese workers)

On the following day, they moved all of us to the company's warehouse and posted guards at all the doors. Our employer, the person who exploited us and brought guards and policemen into the dormitory to assault us, was the first to speak to the assembled workers sitting on the floor. (Photo: the delegation from Vietnam) The delegation threatened us, led us individually to a separate room to force us to sign some papers that we were not allowed to read in advance. We resisted. Several workers tried to run out of the warehouse, but members of the Vietnamese delegation used force to stop them. Fortunately the Jordanian security guards themselves saved us by opening the doors wide. A Vietnamese delegation member pulled Ms. Ánh by her hair and applied a joint lock on her arm. She passed out because she was still weak from being beaten badly by security guards a few weeks before. Some of us helped bring her to her room where she lay unconscious for a long time. (Photo: Ánh in a coma)

The delegation from Vietnam gave us nothing, not even a pack of noodle, an ounce of medicine, or a penny, in spite of our apparent weakness, illness and being undernourished.

Beginning on March 17, Vietnam's government repatriated us in small groups of 5 to 6. I found out later that the Jordanian government had pressured Vietnam into doing so after Representative Chris Smith met with the King and Queen of Jordan. Congressman Frank Wolf wrote to the Jordanian ambassador in the U.S. We thank Messrs. Smith and Wolf, and please convey our gratitude to the King and Queen of Jordan.

At the same time I was told that both MOLISA and MOFA held several press conferences in Vietnam to vilify and threaten me. The MOFA spokesperson who accused me is currently Vietnam's Consul General in Houston, where I am living.

After hearing all that, when waiting for a plane transfer at Bangkok Airport in Thailand for the last leg of the flight to Vietnam, I quietly left the airport. I had my passport and went to meet a person that Dr. Thắng had arranged to meet me outside of the airport to take me to a safe place. This took place on March 28, 2008. My former co-workers let me know some time later that the Public Security police who waited to meet repatriated workers were quite angry when they learned that I had escaped.

While in Thailand, BPSOS assisted me in my daily life and with legal aid for my refugee status application. Regrettably, UNHCR refused to recognize me as a refugee on first instance. During the appeal period, personnel from the Vietnamese Embassy in Thailand tailed me and frequently threatened me via telephone – they would have my relatives in Vietnam harmed and my body chopped up after they kill me. I recorded their threats. During the 2.5 years in Thailand, BPSOS had to move me 4 times because embassy personnel managed to track me.

It was a terrible blow for me when I learned on August 1 that my three-year old daughter had been in an accident and been electrocuted in Vietnam. I passed out twice and seriously

considered suicide. I lost appetite, could not sleep and had to be hospitalized several times. I even considered sneaking back to Vietnam for my daughter's funeral. However, many people dissuaded me, stating that I would have been jailed or worse by the Vietnamese government. Later, my relatives informed me that the Public Security police surrounded my house, and prevented my family from burying my daughter for a number of days to see if I would return.

In Thailand I maintained contact with fellow workers, now back in Vietnam, who stood up against our exploitation in Jordan. They were determined to fight for justice and sought reimbursement by the labor-export companies. They sent petitions to many government offices, from the Prime Minister to the People's Procuracy, from MOLISA to the People's Committees. The Public Security police threatened them. Ms. Nguyễn Thị Luyễn, who rode her motorbike to meet several former co-workers to collect information and signatures, was hit in a deliberate traffic accident with the warning: "you will not survive next time". Luyễn continued her task. Once, as she returned to her hometown from Hanoi, two motorcycle riders trapped her between them and pushed her into an oncoming truck. Although she did not die, she is now in a comatose state.

A number of former workers hired a lawyer to sue their labor-export companies. In court, the judge ordered the plaintiffs to negotiate with those companies, the same ones that had defrauded and trafficked them. On December 30, the Public Security Ministry in Hanoi ordered the most active plaintiffs to their offices where officials scolded, threatened and ordered them to stop all efforts aimed at seeking justice. (Photo: victims of trafficking filling out petitions demanding justice)

As a last resort, I requested Dr. Thắng to help a number of people who were gravely ill or whose family was in dire financial straits by introducing them to the IOM office in Hanoi. However, Vietnam allowed IOM to assist only those that Vietnam's government authorized to receive assistance. Dr. Thắng arranged for the victims to meet with the U.S. Embassy officer in charge of anti-trafficking in persons. She promised to help, but nothing came out of it. (Photo: meeting with U.S. Embassy staff)

Ms. Ngọc, the worker whom Jordanian security guards dragged by her hair, did not recover; she was carried in a litter when she got off the plane in Vietnam, and passed away a year later. Ms. Ánh, who was roughened twice in Jordan, lost weight permanently and is still weak. Ms. Thảo, who was always with me during the fight in Jordan, left her hometown, got married and gave birth, but the government refused to issue her marriage license. Many others left to work as migrant workers in other countries in order to pay their debts.

I still suffer from trauma, fainting spells, loss of sleep and loss of appetite. I have a chronic headache from a blow by a Jordanian guard. Last week I had to go to the hospital on account of my headache. Threatening email messages and phone calls still come to me after I resettled in the U.S.

I have tried to share my story with different groups who have wanted to assist me. I know that testifying today will increase the risk to me and my family. However, I must bring to light the human trafficking that the Vietnamese government supports so that no one else will

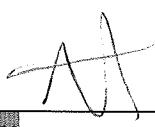
need to suffer like me. I want to raise awareness and make those accountable for their actions to pay and to stop their terrible deeds. I want US companies to take responsibilities and not hide behind third parties who torture, imprison and kill us.

I sincerely thank all of you for everything that you have done for me, my fellow co-workers, and many other victims of human trafficking in the world. Please help me in putting an end to the human trafficking associated with Vietnam's labor-export program.

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs**

**"TRUTH IN TESTIMONY" DISCLOSURE FORM**

Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives and the Rules of the Committee require the disclosure of the following information. A copy of this form should be attached to your written testimony and will be made publicly available in electronic format, per House Rules.

<b>1. Name:</b>  Phuong-Anh Vu	<b>2. Organization or organizations you are representing:</b>  None
<b>3. Date of Committee hearing:</b>  Jan 24, 2012	
<b>4. Have you received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>	<b>5. Have any of the organizations you are representing received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>6. If you answered yes to either item 4 or 5, please list the source and amount of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant was you or the organization(s) you are representing. You may list additional grants or contracts on additional sheets.</b>	
<b>7. Signature:</b>  	

*Please attach a copy of this form to your written testimony.*