

118TH CONGRESS
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S. RES. 395

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

OCTOBER 4, 2023

Mr. TILLIS (for himself and Mr. BUDD) 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 are an 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 American Protestant missionaries subsequently converted many to various Protestant denominations;

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 an 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 or belief, 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 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 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (in this resolution referred to as the “2022 Human Rights Report”) documents that not all members of ethnic minorities were able to engage in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, and traditions, even though ethnic minority group members constituted a sizeable percentage of the population in certain areas, including the Northwest, the Central Highlands, and portions of the Mekong Delta;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report states that although Vietnamese law prohibits violence and discrimination against ethnic minorities, such social discrimination was longstanding and persistent, including in the Central Highlands;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report documents that Vietnamese authorities monitored, harassed, and intimidated members of certain ethnic minority groups, particularly ethnoreligious minorities in the Central and Northwest Highland;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report documents that Vietnamese authorities used national security laws to impose lengthy prison sentences on members of ethnic minorities for their connections to overseas organizations the government claimed espoused separatist aims;

Whereas the 2022 Human Rights Report documents that land expropriation and preferential government treatment for nonindigenous residents in these areas was common, despite the government previously allocating land to ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands;

Whereas the Department of State’s 2022 International Religious Freedom Report documents that Montagnard

Christians reported being summoned, arrested, and fined by police in Dak Lak Province related to inquiries about legally registering their religious group, commemorating International Religious Freedom Day in 2021, and communication with international diplomatic missions and religious freedom nongovernmental organizations;

Whereas the Department of State's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report documents accounts from a Montagnard Christian in Gia Lai Province that during the year, he was interrogated by police, detained, and beaten multiple times while authorities repeatedly demanded that he renounce affiliation with his church, including an incident in which police burned his Bible and other religious materials, placed the embers on his face, and hung him from the ceiling and beat him with a stick for hours;

Whereas the Department of State's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report documents that police prevented Montagnard Christians from gathering during important religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas or forced them to take down their decorations for Christmas;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) references in its 2023 Annual Report many reports of local authorities harassing members of unregistered Montagnard Protestant groups, disrupting and banning their peaceful religious activities, interrogating and threatening them with imprisonment, imposing heavy fines, and coercing them to denounce and leave their denominations and instead join state-controlled Protestant organizations;

Whereas the 2023 USCIRF Report documents many reports of local authorities harassing members of unregistered

Montagnard Protestant groups, disrupting and banning their peaceful religious activities, interrogating and threatening them with imprisonment, imposing heavy fines, and coercing them to denounce and leave their denominations and instead join state-controlled Protestant organizations;

Whereas the 2019 USCIRF Report documents that one-quarter of prisoners of conscience were minority religious groups, including Montagnard Christians;

Whereas the 2019 USCIRF Report estimates that 10,000 individuals in the Central Highlands are refused ID cards, household registration, and birth certificates by local authorities in retaliation for refusing to renounce their faith;

Whereas USCIRF has recommended every year since 2002 that Vietnam be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105–292) due to “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom”; and

Whereas, on November 30, 2022, in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the Secretary of State placed Vietnam on the Special Watch List (SWL) for having engaged in or tolerated “severe violations of religious freedom”: 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;

1 (2) condemns ongoing actions by the Govern-
2 ment of Vietnam to suppress basic human rights
3 and civil liberties for all its citizens;

4 (3) calls on the Government of Vietnam to
5 allow human rights groups access to all regions of
6 the country and to end restrictions of basic human
7 rights, including the right for Montagnards to prac-
8 tice their Christian faith freely, the right to land and
9 property, freedom of movement, the right to retain
10 ethnic identity and culture, and access to an ade-
11 quate standard of living; and

12 (4) urges the President and Congress to develop
13 policies that support Montagnards and other
14 marginalized ethnic minority and indigenous popu-
15 lations in Vietnam and reflect United States inter-
16 ests and commitment to upholding human rights
17 and democracy abroad.

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