

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very fortunate to have this opportunity to speak with you today.

An Le Background

When I was a child, my parents always taught me the meaning of the word “Freedom”. In 1954, when I was 12 and-a-half years old, my family left Hanoi in North Viet Nam to resettle in Saigon, South Viet Nam in search of this “Freedom”. Once again, in 1992, my family and I left Saigon for Austin, Texas in search of this “Freedom”. We are living and enjoying this concept of “Freedom” here in the United States. I hope my family will never have to relocate again to enjoy “Freedom”.

I was and am my father’s only son. This exempted me from the draft, but I could not bear to sit still and witness my country being invaded by communist forces. I decided to join the Armed Forces of the Republic of Viet Nam to protect my country from Communist rules. After 9 plus years of service, I earn the rank of Captain. From 1971 to 1975, I served as the Liaison Officer to the President of the Republic of Viet Nam.

Fall of Saigon

I was working in the Presidential Palace when Saigon fell. You may have seen video footage of communist tanks rolling over the gates of the palace. I saw those tanks approaching from *inside* the palace. I fled the Palace at that moment by jumping the back wall. I went home to meet my two brothers-in-law. We discussed how we, as soldiers, are to go into the jungle join the comrades-in-arms and continue the fight against the Communists.

Came home

After several weeks of looking we did not find anyone else, so we snuck back home. We thought maybe we were just not in the right places and that was the reason we did not meet up with any other soldiers.

A few weeks after we made it home, the Communists came to our homes and us for the crime of “serving our country” for that they called us “traitors”. We did not surrender and we did not voluntarily report to the communist to accept our spot in their so-called “Re-Education” camps.

Prison

They locked me up in seven different hard labor camps. I spent over six years (or exactly 1992 days and 12 hours) in those horrible camps, where they tried to brainwash us. I never surrendered.

I spent one year in solitary confinement for speaking up against Communist doctrines. My captors said that I would be released if I accepted communism and became a good citizen of the communist regime. I refused, so in addition to spending one year in the solitary cell, I spent over three years in a *special punishment* camp in Central Viet Nam.

One of my two brothers-in-law died in a camp much like mine. The other survived over thirteen years in different re-education camps North Viet Nam. We were moved every six months to a year because they were afraid that if left in one place we would make friends with one another and tried to revolt against them or to escape from the camps to fight them.

Application

I was released from these re-education camps in November 1981. After several years of waiting, in 1984 I submitted all the required paperwork to come to the United States of America as a political prisoner. The lengthy application process kept me in Viet Nam until July 1992. Thanks to the work of Vietnamese activists like Mrs. Khuc Minh Tho, who joins us today, my years in prison allowed me and my family to immigrate to the United States of America.

Flag of SVN

My wife and our younger son arrived in Austin, TX in July 1992. During a meeting of former Vietnamese soldiers who gathered under the name of the Vietnamese Veterans Association in Austin, I saw our beloved yellow and red flag for the first time in 17 years. I could not stop myself from crying. Tears of joy, of course, because I could see it again, and honor it again. Bitter tears, too, because this Flag no longer flew over the Vietnamese air, land and seas. Today, it still flies all over the free world. This beautiful yellow with three red stripes Flag represents the courage, the loyalty and the strength of the men and women of the Republic of Viet Nam. This Flag belongs to a land that used to be free. Today it joins me in this nation, a nation that created the ideas of true freedom and true democracy for its citizens.

Grateful

I want to show my gratitude to the people of the United States of America for accepting me and my family. This beautiful and great country has given us a second chance to live in freedom and democracy.

Life today

Today, my youngest grandson is 8 months old, and he is an American National of Vietnamese descent. I want to teach my children and grandchildren the values of life. I want them to know how to deal with hardship, obtain a good education, and above all, live with good virtues. I believe in his future, like the future of the millions of other young American children of Vietnamese descent. Their future is full of opportunity and hope. I look at him and I understand why I risked my life to fight for his freedom.

Pen

My days of fighting Communism with a gun are over. Today I fight it with my pen. A well known American proverb says that “the pen is mightier than the sword”. And with this pen I will share with my children and grandchildren the rich and honorable history of their ancestors; the people who were known as citizens of the Republic of Viet Nam. I will share with them the beautiful language, rich culture and the honored traditions of a great people.

VAHF

My friends and I at the Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation share this mission.

April 30

Each April, 30th, I feel a certain sadness. I lost my country that day. I cannot forget April 30th. I cannot forget the ultimate sacrifice made by over 58,000 Americans and over 300,000 Vietnamese soldiers. They died so we could live under freedom.

My family became American citizens in 1998, and we were proud of being Americans.

To my Vietnamese American friends who came to this country in 1975, thank you for paving the way to freedom and democracy and not forgetting those of us who were left behind.

To my Vietnamese American friends who risked their lives at sea, from 1976 to 1990, to reach freedom, you are the largest and most successful and most admired group.

To my friends, who came under the Humanitarian Operation Program, our years spent serving our country and our years of detention in the Communist prison camps are the price we paid for our families' freedom. I never regret those lost years, because I was a living witness of what Communism really is.

To my American friends who had welcomed us in this country during all those 33 years, thank you.

To the all the American servicemen who died in Viet Nam, and to the Vietnamese servicemen who died for our cause, my prayers are always with you.

To all American and Vietnamese Veterans, thank you for joining me in our fight for freedom.

And to my Texan friends, I was not born in Texas, but I got here as fast as I could.

Thank you.