



Our 40 Year Journey (1975 – 2015)

**Reception
Parliament House, Canberra
22nd June 2015**

VCA's 40 Years of Settlement Reception "Our 40 Year Journey 1975 -2015"

PROGRAM for Monday 22 June 2015

7:00 - 8:00pm

Welcoming Guests, Light Refreshments, Entertainment

8:00pm

Acknowledgment of the Traditional Owners of the Land

8:02pm

National Anthems – A Minute of Silence

8:08pm

Introducing guests and VCA delegates

8:18pm

Welcoming speech – VCA Federal President, Mr Tri Vo

8:24pm

Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia,
the Hon Tony Abbott

8:32pm

Speech by the Leader of the Federal Opposition,
the Hon Bill Shorten

8:40pm

Slide show – "40 Year Journey of Freedom, Aspirations and Contributions of the Vietnamese Community in Australia", compiled by Dr Cuong Trong Bui, President of VCA/QLD & Former President of VCA

8:53pm

Vietnamese traditional Dan Tranh by Ms Ngo Thi Thu Hien

- 8:58pm
Speech by His Excellency the Honourable Hieu Van Le AO
Governor of SA.
- 9:04pm
Speech by the Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
- 9:10pm
Speech by the Hon Jason Clare
- 9:16pm
Special tribute to the late R.H Malcolm Fraser and former
Fraser Government's Immigration Ministers
- 9:25pm
Acknowledgements of MPs/Senators and Presentations
- 9:40pm
Acknowledgements of VCA Presidents, and
Acknowledgments of organisations that helped the
Vietnamese Refugees.
- 9:45pm
Final words of thanks from the Organising Committee
- 9:48pm
Photo opportunity
- 9:55pm
Entertainment, Networking and continuing with light
refreshments

Technical support person: Dr Thang Ha President, VCA NSW

*MCs: Ms Viv Nguyen, Vice President, VCA Vic
Mr Cong Le, President, VCA-ACT*

Vietnamese community in Australia (VCA) – National Representatives .

Mr Tri Vo	- President of VCA
Dr Anh Nguyen	- Vice President Internal Affairs
Dr Cao Thang Ha	- Vice President External Affairs
Mr Phong Nguyen	- General Secretary
Mrs H Thuy Teresa Tran	- Treasurer

Vietnamese community in Australia (VCA) from each state and territory of Australia.

Dr Cao Thang Ha	- President of VCA from NSW.
Mr Bon Nguyen	- President of VCA from VIC.
Dr Bui Trong Cuong	- President of VCA from QLD.
Mr Loc Doan	- President of VCA from SA.
Dr Anh Nguyen	- President of VCA from WA.
Mr Cong Le	- President of VCA from ACT.
Mr Thien Le	- President of VCA from NT.
Mrs H Thuy Teresa Tran	- President of VCA from Wollongong.

The VCA: Brief Note from its inception in 1977

By Tuong Quang Luu AO, inaugural VCA President, 1977 – 1982

The Vietnamese were not an emigrant people. Throughout their long history, they did move south in search of a homeland and then further south to expand it, but never did they leave their ancestors' birth place for an economic reason to make a new life in an overseas country.

During the French colonial period, the Vietnamese were encouraged to move to Laos and Cambodia for administrative and trade purposes within the French Indochina. A limited number went to France mainly for education or to New Caledonia to meet the labour needs of another French territory. The biggest movement of people took place for a political reason in 1954 when Vietnam was partitioned at the 17th parallel under the Geneva Accords. Almost one million Vietnamese fled the soon-to-become communist North to the non-communist South, but this movement was essentially still an internal migration.

The course of history changed drastically as a result of the Fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975 and the subsequent forced reunification of Vietnam under a totalitarian communist regime.

The Vietnamese exodus began, but they had nowhere to go. Most Vietnamese risked their life to escape communist persecution by sea, hence they became known as the "boat people". Many endured an equally hazardous journey overland across Cambodia to Thailand. The human costs remain too painful to contemplate even after 40 years. Around one million Vietnamese survived either journey out of a UNHCR estimate of 1.5 m departures which were one of the largest calamities of the 20th Century.

Before 1975, a permanent Vietnamese community in Australia hardly existed, apart from some 700 who had settled here as spouses or through adoption and students as temporary residents.

At the Fall of Saigon, those Vietnamese students - mostly under the Colombo Plan scholarship for tertiary studies - were stranded. They were subsequently allowed to remain permanently in Australia, where Vietnamese-born residents increased to 2 427 a year later according to Census 1976.

Without any migrant experience and still in a very small number, the first few thousands of freshly arrivals saw the need to have some form of community groupings for mutual support. In one way or another, Vietnamese associations were set up in the ACT, NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia.

One of the greatest strengths of a democracy like Australia is the role of civil society in advocacy and opinion leadership. Both immediately before and after the collapse of South Vietnam, religious leaders of all denominations and civic leaders of various political persuasions raised their voices for a humanitarian response to the plight of

Vietnamese at risk after a communist victory. For reasons which were well established, namely domestic political consideration and future foreign policy direction (see for example Denis Warner and Hal G. P. Colebatch) the government of the day was non-responsive.



The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Fraser and Mr. Tuong Quang Luu

Although Australia took a different course of action vis-à-vis the Vietnamese refugees in South East Asia after the event of November 11, 1975, advocacy role and direct input from a refugee community were advisable, indeed were considered necessary then as they are still relevant now. Within this context that in my capacity as President of the Vietnamese Association in the ACT, I convened the first national conference of all Vietnamese organisations to meet in Canberra on Boxing Day 26 December 1977 at a private residence on Callabonna Street, Kaleen ACT 2617.

There were 11 delegates to this first meeting:

From the ACT: Mr. Luu, Tuong Quang and Dr. Tran, My-Van

From NSW: Mr. Nguyen, Anh Tuan and Mr. Vo, Dai Ton

From Victoria: Dr. Nguyen, Trieu Dan, Mrs. Huynh, Bich Cam, and Mr. Doan, Viet Trung

From Western Australia: Mrs. Tran, Thi Hoà

From Queensland: Dr. Bui, Trong Cuong (by proxy)

From: South Australia: Mr. Nguyen, Van Tuoi and Mr. Duong, Nguyen (by proxy)

Of this original group, four have now deceased and I pay tributes to their contribution.

The late Mr. Nguyen Van Tuoi and the late Mr. Duong Nguyen, as devout Buddhists, also set up the first Vietnamese Buddhist Association in Adelaide in 1977. The late Mr. Nguyen Anh Tuan, who had been a graduate in engineering from the University of Adelaide in the early 1960s with a long career with Air Vietnam in Saigon,

returned to Sydney in May 1975 as a refugee. And the late Dr. Nguyen Trieu Dan who was a Paris-educated political scientist and the last Ambassador of the Republic of Vietnam to Japan came to resettle in Melbourne with his family.



VCA National Presidents: Quang Luu, Cuong Bui, Cuong Vo, Trung Doan, Tien Nguyen and Phong Nguyen {Not in the photo: Tri Vo}

The sole aim of the Boxing Day 1977 meeting was to set up a national body representing all Vietnamese residents in Australia.

After a day-long deliberation, the conference unanimously resolved to create that body called *Tong Hoi Nguoi Viet Tu Do Uc Chau*, which was subsequently renamed *Cong Dong Nguoi Viet Tu Do Uc Chau* or The Vietnamese Community in Australia (VCA).

The first conference also unanimously chose me as its first National President, perhaps because of my knowledge and familiarity of Australia and the Australian social and political structures, as I had served four and a half years as a diplomat at the Embassy of the Republic of Vietnam. I left Canberra in October 1974 at the end of my term to be back to Saigon for a new position in the central office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I returned to Canberra in late May 1975 as a Vietnamese refugee.

Of the original delegates, Dr. Bui Trong Cuong would later become the second National President and Mr. Doan Viet Trung, the fourth National President.

From 1977 to 2015, there have been only 7 National Presidents:

1. Luu, Tuong Quang, Canberra, (1977-1982)
2. Bui, Trong Cuong, Brisbane, (1982-1991)
3. Vo, Minh Cuong, Sydney (1991-1999)
4. Doan, Viet Trung, Melbourne (1999-2003)
5. Nguyen, Manh Tien, Sydney (2004-2008)
6. Nguyen, The Phong, Melbourne (2008-2012)
7. Vo, Tri Dung, Sydney (2012-2016)

After a change in the VCA Constitution in 1999, a national president can only serve a maximum of 2 terms of 4 years continuously.

Since its inception in 1977, the VCA national executive has consistently pursued their dual role of coordination and advocacy, while state branches assume responsibilities for service delivery and handle all state-based issues. Both national and state structures hold their general meeting once a year and an election for a new executive takes place at every second AGM.

Even though their dual role has remained the same during the last 38 years, the VCA's focus on policy issues and strategies may vary as changes took place in national and international environment and as the Vietnamese Australians have grown to become the 6th largest culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, our focus was the plights of Vietnamese refugees in South East Asia and Australia's policy approach to this tragedy. That did not mean of course that we were then less concerned than we are now on the human rights records of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, because its policy and practices of persecution and revenge were the push factor of the Vietnamese exodus in the first place.

Two other issues caused great concern for us at the time. One was the harsh policies of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia in pushing back the Vietnamese boats out from their shore, causing further losses of life and the other was the first International Conference in 1979 in Geneva on the Indochinese Asylum Seekers. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (Nov 1975-1983) and his first Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr. Michael MacKellar (Nov 1975-79) not only changed the previous government's stand but also initiated a humanitarian approach in dealing with these two events. Together with the United States, Australia played a major role in halting the "turn back the boats" and in setting up a UNHCR-provided temporary protection in South East Asia and Hong Kong pending resettlement in third countries.

As a Vietnamese voice, we made every effort to raise public awareness by organising what could be the first post-1975 Vietnamese "walking" demonstration from the (Old) Parliament House to the High Commission of Malaysia then to the Royal Thai Embassy to present our petitions and back to the Parliament House where, via some electronic media such as TV Chanel 7 and Radio Australia, I made a passionate appeal to both Australian and regional authorities to provide humanitarian assistance to the Vietnamese "boat people" in great danger at sea.

In the early 1980s, the VCA contributed its view as part of the Government consultation process to initiate an Orderly Departure Program (ODP) for Vietnamese family reunion. For this purpose, I was fortunate to have met Mr. Ian Macphee (1979-82) at his parliamentary office as the Fraser government's second Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

When Prime Minister Bob Hawke took over in 1983 and until 1989, the Labor Government did not change many of the previous coalition government policies on Indochinese refugees. The VCA continued its advocacy role and enjoyed access to the Hawke and Keating governments' Ministers in charge of the Immigration Portfolio, such as Mr. Stewart West, Mr. Chris Hurford, Mr. Mick Young, Senator Robert Ray, Mr. Gerry Hand and Senator Nick Bolkus.

In 1989, the Second International Conference on Indochinese Refugees was convened in Geneva to agree upon a strategy known as the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) which eventually brought to an end various UNHCR-sponsored camps and the Vietnamese resettlement in 1996. This was indeed a challenging period for the VCA in terms of its coordinating response, advocacy and practical assistance to fellow Vietnamese who did not agree to repatriation.

As the community grew in strength and numbers, quite rapidly at least until the early 1990s, the VCA sought to increase its access to elected representatives at all three levels of governments of all political persuasions. As part of Australia's civil society, the VCA has naturally continued its interest in multicultural, immigration and resettlement matters.

From mid 1990s however, the VCA has also intensified its representation out of its acute concern for human rights and democracy in their country of origin, Vietnam. Its efforts have been accentuated by national and international events such as the lifting of the US embargo against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) in 1995, the bilateral human rights dialogue between Australia and the SRV since 2002, the formal application of the SRV Resolution 36 of 2004 relating to Vietnamese communities abroad and China's illegal practices and coercive policy in the South China Sea (known as Bien Dong or the East Sea by Vietnam), to name just a few.

In the early 2000s, the issue of "asylum seekers and boat people" re-emerged and continued on for over a decade. Australia's responses this time from both sides of politics were much hard-lined on the basis of the claimed context of border protection. Occasional arrivals of Vietnamese asylum seekers still required the VCA's interventions with mixed outcomes.

The VCA however has always played a constructive role and maintained good working contacts within and outside the immigration and multicultural affairs portfolios. Ministers and former ministers, other current and former parliamentarians such as Mr. Philip Ruddock, Mr. Chris Bowen, Mr. Jason Clare, Mr. Chris Hayes, Mr. Laurie Ferguson, Mr. Greg Kelly, Mr. Luke Simpkins, Mr. Peter McGauran, Mr. Gary Hardgrave, Mr. Lindsay Tanner, Senator Stephen Conroy, Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Senator Arthur Sinodinos, (former) Senator Ron Boswell, (former) Senator Bob Carr etc...are amongst those the VCA would always seek support as part of its advocacy role.

In addition to regular inputs and submissions, Phong Nguyen took an initiative during his second term to put our views on the bilateral human rights dialogue between Australia and the SRV on parliamentary records. The VCA's formal Petitions with over 55 000 signatures were presented to both Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament in June 2012 requesting Australia to take a more active and comprehensive approach to human rights violations in Vietnam.

Likewise in 2014, as China intensified its aggressive behaviour over the disputes in the South China Sea, as evidenced by its installation of Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone on 2 May, another set of formal Petitions (which I also drafted) were presented to the House of Representatives and the Senate in Canberra. The VCA urged by way of Petitions to Parliament, Australia to take a stronger stand against China's unilateral and coercive actions which change the status quo in the South China Sea where Australia has an important national interest as a trading nation.

The VCA acknowledges with deep gratitude, the invaluable assistance extended to it since 1977 by federal and state parliamentarians, by mayors and councillors, academics, authors, journalists and all civic and other community leaders.

[2015] (c) Tuong Quang Luu, AO (extract from his forthcoming publication to mark 40 years of Vietnamese Settlement in Australia)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Vietnamese community in Australia would like to acknowledge the following NGOs and Government Departments that helped our people to settle in Australia in the early years:

- I.O.M
- Austcare
- Australian Red Cross
- St Vincent De Paul Society
- Salvation Army
- CARITAS Australia
- Catholic Church
- Uniting Church
- Church of England
- Baptist Churches
- Department of Immigration
- Department of Social security
- Department of Human Services
- Adult Migrants English Services
- The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)
- and ICRA (Indo-China Refugee Association)
- All other government agencies: federal, state and local levels
- And many hundreds and thousands of social workers, teachers, nurses, doctors, volunteers, individual members of the community from all walks of life who have made our integration journey welcoming and seamless.



Vietnamese Community in Australia

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