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Message of solidarity with the people of Dong Tam village, Vietnam

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Once again, conflicts over land rights have broken out in communist-ruled Vietnam. This time, the results are deadly.

According news reports, a huge security contingent made up of thousands of officers from the police, riot and armed forces stormed a village on the outskirts of Hanoi in the early hours of January 9, 2020. As if moving against a terrorist leader, security forces sealed off the commune of Dong Tam, illuminated the night with flash grenades, and in a hail of bullets burst into the home of 84-year-old Le Dinh Kinh. Security forces reportedly killed Mr Le, along with his son and his 3-month-old grandson. But Le Dinh Kinh was not a terrorist or fugitive. A long-time member of the Communist Party, he was the patriarch of a respected family and leader of a local protest movement against corruption.

The village of Dong Tam has been effectively in lockdown, with no independent media being granted access to the area. The issue of land confiscation for economic gain in the Dong Tam area has been an ongoing issue, with unfair and arbitrary land seizures a major problem in the country.

This time last year, Vietnamese communist authorities also violently destroyed the homes and properties belonging to people of the Catholic Parish of Loc Hung, near Ho Chi Minh City. These victims were mostly low-income families, students, former prisoners of conscience and amputee-veterans of the South Vietnamese Army. To this day, they are left homeless, their livelihoods totally ruined and their lives irreparably damaged. All this happened on the eve of the Lunar New Year, Tet, which is considered the most sacred celebration in Vietnam. Many of them were left at the mercy of the elements and the support of religious groups such as the Redemptorist Fathers and fellow parishioners.

These incidents are proof that the Vietnamese communist regime does not respect the rule of law. In fact, many observers would say that the human rights situation in Vietnam has continued to worsen, with a crackdown on basic human rights and freedoms very much intensifying.

I would like to unite myself with the people of Dong Tam (meaning "United Hearts") and add my support to their struggle for dignity in the midst of the incredible ordeal that has been forced on them. I pray that justice and equity may prevail in Dong Tam and my country of birth.

I also urge the authorities to refrain from acts of violence, terror and repression against the people towards whom they have a duty to protect and assist. I call on the Vietnamese government at all levels to respect the human rights of its own citizens, to promote the common good and to ensure justice and dignity for the people affected.

I call on the Australian Government and all people of good will, both inside and outside Vietnam to support the victims of the land seizure in their struggle for justice and dignity.

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