

# Written to my Vietnamese friends who have spent all or most of their lives not in Vietnam

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First, I hope you can excuse my bad English because, as a matter of fact, I know you cannot read well in Vietnamese, or cannot read a word at all, and there's no other way for me to write for you. And I'm merely writing these lines to express my feelings as Vietnamese patriot after 15 years living in Vietnam, and less than 1 year and a half staying in Norway.

It is nonsense to tell you to be grateful for being alive. It is nonsense to tell you to be grateful for being healthy. It is nonsense to tell you to be grateful for having food. It is nonsense to tell you to be grateful for having a family, and friends, and people who love you. You never understand what misery is if you just stand and look at wretched people from a distance, because you'll soon forget them and turn back to your own problems. I am thankful. I know how it's like to live in a country where human rights do not exist and we constantly worry about lots of things every single day. I know how it's like to live in a country where there's no democracy and freedom of speech, and those who speak out lose their jobs, or are even sentenced to imprisonment. I know how it's like to live in a country where leaders are dictators, and they merely think for themselves and their pockets instead of the residents, the sovereignty and development of the country. I know how it's like to live in a country where nothing is taken for granted, and I may die at any time, because of traffic accidents, pollutions, the bad quality of the roads...

I am thankful. I experience, I know, and I know I cannot just sit here passively enjoying my new life in a new country. I know I cannot just remain silent whereas my compatriots suffer from inequalities and don't have a voice to speak.

I deeply know, on your mind, you tend to consider yourself a Norwegian, a German, an American, a French... I also know, you know hardly anything about Vietnam, except the language, some traditions, some kinds of food and a little bit of history, and from a far, from your point of view, you think it's your root, and people who live there don't have democracy, freedom of speech and human rights, blah blah blah. That's all you know. And you easily forget it. With all of its social issues. You look at it as an unfamiliar country with problems, and turn away, back to your own life.

Let me tell you something.

Sometimes, you should just stop, and think a little bit. Why are you here? What made your parents move? Why didn't your parents stay and why weren't you born in Vietnam? What are the reasons? Poverty. Inequality. Dictatorship. Lack of freedom. Just think, how lucky you are to be here, to have a good life with good conditions that you don't have to worry about school fees, polluted air, traffic accidents, your parents' unemployment, diseases... To live in a good country, your life is, in some way, taken for granted, and you can have lots of opportunities. Just think, you can say your opinion, vote and demonstrate. Just think, no one imprisons you just because you have a blog and mention about social issues and criticize the government. Perhaps you also know how lucky you are. Perhaps you also feel grateful. But it makes no sense if you think merely for yourself and forget that lots of people there, in Vietnam, are still struggling for real freedom. I never expect you to bring democracy to Vietnam. Never. I solely hope that, somehow, you sometimes just think of people other than yourself and your family, and support us. Like Isabel Allende once said "How can one not write about war, poverty and inequality when people who suffer from these afflictions don't have a voice to speak?"

It is useless to meet other Vietnamese once a year somewhere. It is useless to attend a conference, discuss the current issues and then each one returns home without finding any

specific and sufficient solution. It is useless to organize parties or festivals in other countries outside Vietnam. It is useless to register your name for a list of friends of some party. It is useless to put some photos of the imprisoned dissidents or something like “No bauxite mining” as your profile picture on facebook. Do something that makes sense. I never do such things. My refusal doesn't mean that I'm not patriotic. I only do something that makes sense, and I hope you also do. Support us. Contribute to the revolution. And if you ask, yes, I still strongly believe that some day in my country there will be democracy. And now, while that day hasn't come, I keep doing my best to struggle for liberty.

Remember it.

I am Nguyễn Đắc Hải Di (also known as Joyce Anne Nguyen with my articles).

Thank you