



Witness Project Podcast Launched

VOC is excited to announce the launch of our Witness Project Podcast. This new initiative expands the Witness Project into a new medium and continues to illuminate the heartbreaking yet resilient tales of individuals who have suffered under communism.

Our inaugural episode, published on August 8, introduced audiences to Vi Kha Hoang, a survivor of Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam, who escaped in a small fishing boat with other survivors.

The year is 1989 and a group of 13 people are out on the open ocean in a small fishing boat, miles away from the shoreline. They have encountered pirates, storms, and sustained injuries, and have yet to see any signs of land. The group is made up of men and women, both young and old, including a pregnant mother and two young children. The people on board have escaped Vietnam, risking their lives on the sea, to find their freedom in another country, any country, free from communism. What drove them to this perilous decision and a brush with almost certain death?

This is the story of Kha who, like so many other brave Vietnamese Americans, risked their lives to escape communism.



Vi Kha Hoang interviewed for our Witness Project Podcast inaugural episode.

“Communism is just another form of dictatorship. You can see who the power, the benefits, everything good, is only in the hands of a few people on the top. You cannot get to the top. You are the servant at the bottom and the top is always controlling you like an animal. That’s communism. You don’t have any freedom. Be careful. It looks good but it doesn’t mean it’s good.” —Vi Kha Hoang



Boris Hoffman was interviewed for VOC's Witness Project Documentary and Podcast.

Our recent podcast episode, released on September 13, features Boris Hoffman, who was born in Soviet-occupied Lithuania in 1954 and grew up hearing the brutal stories of Stalin's gulag from his family, friends, and neighbors. Raised by parents who refused to join the communist party, and grandparents whose farm was collectivized by the state and who were later sent to a labor camp in Siberia, Boris saw through Moscow's lies and realized at an early age that neither he, nor his family, could truly live in the Soviet Union—they could only hope to survive.

As we continue to add new episodes, we'll introduce you to more unique stories, each carrying a piece of the complex puzzle that is life under communism. Each episode will take you on a journey of understanding, empathy, and acknowledgement of the resilience of the human spirit against the odds. The Witness Project Podcast can be streamed on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and the VOC website.

2023 National Teachers Seminar

VOC hosted the 8th annual National Seminar for Middle and High School Educators from July 10 through July 14, 2023. Teachers from public, private, and home school programs and those interested in education attended the week-long event at the Victims of Communism Museum in Washington, DC where they learned from top academic experts about the foundational concepts and key figures in the history of communism, and the over 100 million victims killed in just over 100 years. Educators also heard first-person testimony from survivors of communist rule and learned how to teach their students about the legacy of communism and its ongoing threat to freedom through our curriculum.



George Ridgeway, Kirsten Barksdale, and Elvin Enriquez (from left to right) participating in our National Teachers Seminar.



VOC Chairman, Dr. Elizabeth Spalding, giving a tour of the VOC Museum tour to seminar participants.

Seminar faculty included Dr. Paul Kengor, Professor of Political Science at Grove City College; Soviet-born Dr. Naya Lekht, who immigrated to the US in 1989 and spoke on the communists' powerful use of propaganda in film, literature, and art; Steven W. Mosher, social scientist and anti-communist; Catherine O'Connor, homeschool educator; Dr. Jonathan Pidluzny, Director of Higher Education Reform Initiative at the America First Policy Institute; Dr. Elizabeth Spalding, VOC Board Chairman and Founding Director of the Victims of Communism Museum; and Dr. F. Flagg Taylor IV, VOC Academic Council member and Associate Professor of Government at Skidmore College.

Seminar attendees also heard unforgettable stories of the victims and survivors of communist regimes. Men and women such as Tanel Kapper who refused to take an oath to serve in the Soviet Army and took incredible steps to escape from Siberia, Channy Chhi Laux, a survivor of the brutal Cambodian Khmer Rouge's genocidal regime, David Smolansky, the former mayor of El Hatillo municipality in Caracas, Venezuela who called out Maduro about political prisoners and was subsequently removed from office by the Maduro administration and forced to flee Venezuela, and Lily Tang Williams, a compelling advocate for freedom against the Chinese Communist Party's regime of oppression.

The educators received a private tour of the Victims of Communism Museum from its Founding Director, Dr. Elizabeth Spalding, as well as Dr. Flagg Taylor. They also had the chance to participate in breakout sessions and discuss tools for classroom pedagogy. Dr. Lee Edwards, Founding Chairman of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, and Brandy Shufutinsky, from the Institute for Liberal Values, each gave briefings to the teachers during a luncheon. Major Sam Gildner gave a special briefing on the situation in Ukraine.

"The VOC conference was truly a life-changing experience. The in-depth lectures and witness speakers made me realize just how little I knew about communism and its impact across the world. I have been recommending this conference wherever and whenever I can!" —Emily McLean

Congress Introduces Bill To Educate On Communism



On September 5, Rep. María Elvira Salazar (R-FL) and 27 of her colleagues reintroduced the Crucial Communism Teaching (CCT) Act (H.R. 5349) in the 118th Congress. The CCT Act makes educational materials available through the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation to help educate middle and high school students about the dangers of communism and totalitarianism, and how they are contrary to the founding principles of freedom and democracy in the United States. Over 100 million people have died due to the tragic legacy of communism. However, due to a lack of accurate education materials, almost one-third of Generation-Z members have a favorable view of communism.

“Communism is one of the most destructive political ideologies the world has ever seen. The Crucial Communism Teaching Act is important because our youth must remember the crimes of the communists, including those inflicted upon my constituents and their families in Florida’s 27th district.” —Rep. María Elvira Salazar (R-FL)

The CCT Act framework was inspired by the Never Again Education Act, passed by Congress in 2020, which created a program to educate American students about the Holocaust through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The bill also continues similar efforts by Florida and other states to educate American students on the failed experiment of communism throughout history.

“American students deserve to know the truth: communism is not a promise for a more just and equitable future — it is a deadly ideology that runs counter to democracy and the very principles our nation was founded upon.” —Ken Pope, CEO, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation

2023 Captive Nations Summit



On July 19, VOC convened the Captive Nations Summit at the Victims of Communism Museum in Washington, DC, where policymakers and human rights advocates heard first-hand from witnesses of captive nations past and present and discussed Russia's brutal, ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

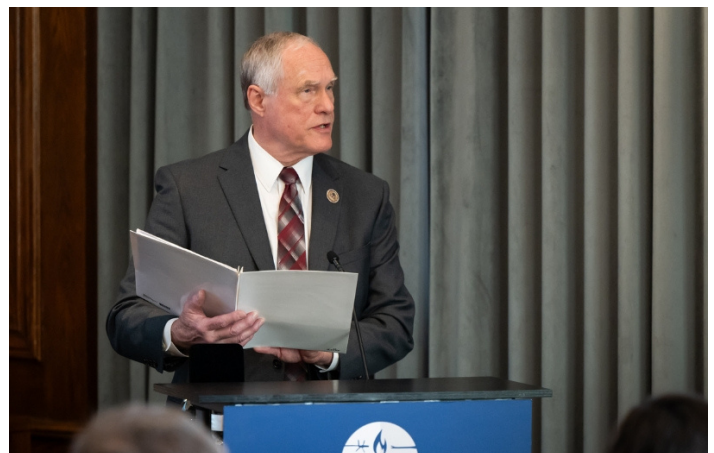
VOC was honored to present Vladimir Kara-Murza with the Dissident Human Rights Award for his tireless advocacy for democracy and human rights in Russia and Father Georgi Edelstein the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom for his lifelong commitment to truth and religious freedom for the peoples of Russia and Ukraine in the face of the Kremlin's authoritarian onslaught.

Natalia Arno, President of the Free Russia Foundation, accepted the Dissident Human Rights Award on behalf of Vladimir Kara-Murza. A prominent Russian democracy advocate, politician, journalist, author, and documentary filmmaker, Kara-Murza is serving a 25-year prison sentence imposed by Putin's regime. His imprisonment is a result of speaking out against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In his written acceptance remarks, Kara-Murza addressed the lasting impact of Russia's communist and totalitarian history, emphasizing that "when evil is not publicly reckoned with and condemned, it always returns...Once again, the truth in Russia is considered a criminal offence."

George Roller received VOC's Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom on behalf of Father Georgi Edelstein, a Russian Orthodox priest known for his unwavering commitment to truth and justice in the face of totalitarianism and oppression. As a longstanding biographer and friend of Father Edelstein, Roller accepted the award and delivered a prepared speech on his behalf. Reflecting on the personal impact of communism, Father Edelstein expressed in his speech, "I have been living under communism for 91 years, and I know that communism always means war—either actual or potential. Communism always means tyranny and bold-faced lies."



VOC Founding Chairman, Dr. Lee Edwards, presented the Dissident Human Rights Award to Vladimir Kara-Murza, accepted by Natalia Arno.



George Roller accepted the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom on behalf of Father Georgi Edelstein.

2023 Captive Nations Summit



Representative Mike Gallagher (R-WI), Chairman of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, spoke on how the United States can resist communist and authoritarian regimes across the globe.

“But most of all, we need to be unshakable in our conviction that American freedom is our most precious possession and worth fighting for. On our worst day, we are miles better than the CCP...In other words, we are the good guys. And we’re going to win.”

Commemorating Captive Nations Week continues to be significant and relevant in today’s modern political discourse. In his Captive Nations Week proclamation, President Biden stated:

“The battle against oppression did not end with the Cold War. The forces of autocracy continue to reassert themselves. In Iran, Belarus, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the People’s Republic of China, and elsewhere, we are seeing an all too familiar contempt for the rule of law, for democracy, for human rights, and even for the truth itself.”

Other keynote speakers at our Summit included Ambassador Paula Dobriansky, Senior Fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government; Dr. Lee Edwards, Founding Chairman of VOC; and Dr. Elizabeth Spalding, Chairman of VOC and Founding Director of the Victims of Communism Museum.

Ambassador Dobriansky reflected on the enduring legacy of her father, The Honorable Lev E. Dobriansky, who focused his life’s work on fighting communism, the transcendent quality of advancing freedom, and the efforts of the Ukrainian people fighting for liberty.

Our panels featured experts who discussed society’s perceptions of Russia’s war in Ukraine, collective memory, and memory politics. We also featured three witnesses of communism who shared their personal stories enduring—and fighting back against—repressive regimes.



VOC Trustee, Amb. Paula Dobriansky, gave keynote remarks at the Captive Nations Summit.



Panelists discuss society’s perceptions of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Thank You To Our 2023 Captive Nations Summit Sponsors:

Brent Baker, Dr. Don Bellante, Paul Blumstein, Orest Deychakiwsky, Dr. Lee Edwards, Dr. Daniel Garrett, Jody Gatwood, Dolkun Isa, Jan Narveson, John Qualy, Erich Reimer, The Hon. Don Ritter, Sc.D., Andrew R. Rokita Jr. , Catharine Trauernicht, and Jason Wright.

Battle Of Warsaw VR Experience

VOC was honored to host a special, virtual reality experience of the Battle of Warsaw on September 14 and 15. Filmed with 360-degree technology and produced by the Polish cultural institution *Niepodległa Office* based in Warsaw. Victoria 1920 tells the powerful and courageous story of the Miracle on the Vistula, when against all odds, Poland defeated the Soviet Red Army in 1920.

The VR experience took viewers through the struggle of a nation united against evil as they saved Europe from a communist onslaught over 100 years ago in an immersive setting. The experience was made possible by the Polish National Foundation and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Washington D.C., in partnership with VOC.



Guests at the museum on September 14 and 15 participating in the Battle of Warsaw VR experience.

Commemoration of Cuba's July 11 Protests



On July 11, VOC co-hosted two events commemorating the two year anniversary of the 2021 pro-democracy protests in Cuba. The first event, a press conference organized by the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba, Center for a Free Cuba, Cuba Decide, Outreach Aid to the Americas, and VOC, took place in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill.

Cuban dissidents spoke about their experiences under the communist regime. The names of victims who died on July 11, 2021, as well as the names of political prisoners who are still jailed were read aloud. Members of Congress spoke, including Rep. Carlos Giménez, Rep. Nicole Malliotakis, Rep. Rick Scott, and Rep. Alex Mooney, as well as Rosa María Payá, daughter of Oswaldo Payá and founder of Cuba Decide, along with Karina Lipsman, VOC's Director of Government Relations.

The event was followed by a vigil outside of the Cuban embassy. The vigil was organized by John Suarez, Executive Director at Center for a Free Cuba, and Rosa María Payá, and was co-hosted by VOC. Representatives from Young Americas Foundation joined the vigil in solidarity. The group prayed in front of the embassy and displayed pictures of some of the thousands of political prisoners currently jailed in Cuba, as well as those who have lost their lives. The names of protestors who died on July 11, 2021, as well as the names of current political prisoners in Cuba, were read aloud.



Cuban activists Rosa María Payá and Yosmani Mayeta hold up a banner advocating for the release of José Daniel Ferrer, the visible head of the dissident movement on the island since Oswaldo Payá's death.



Rosa María Payá delivers remarks at the July 11, 2023 press conference.

Dr. Zenz Delivers Lecture at ASPA Conference

At the 2023 American Political Science Association Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, CA, Dr. Adrian Zenz, VOC China Studies Director, presented the findings of his latest paper titled *Masterminding Mass Internment: Policy Experimentation and the Evolution of Xinjiang's Re-Education Campaign*. In his paper, Dr. Zenz argues that the mass internment campaign initiated by Beijing in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 2017 underwent a creative process of local policy experimentation. This led to the development of an "innovative repression" solution to address what the state viewed as a significant national security threat. Despite being politically sensitive, Beijing employed a form of "policy experimentation under hierarchy" to support the establishment of dedicated re-education internment facilities aimed at "de-extremification."

While the academic community studying Chinese political science has differing opinions on the extent of local policy experimentation under Xi Jinping's more centralized approach to governance, the case of Xinjiang highlights how contemporary Chinese policy experimentation can facilitate the development of "innovative totalitarianism." This enables the implementation of advanced repressive strategies for maintaining security.



Dr. Adrian Zenz presents his most recent research at the 2023 APSA Annual Meeting.

Save the Date

Victims of Communism International Cultural & Food Fair

On Tuesday, November 7, we will mark Victims of Communism Memorial Day with our International Cultural & Food Fair at our museum in Washington, DC.

In partnership with more than 20 embassies and ethnic organizations, we will showcase ethnic cuisine and drink from countries that fell victim to or are still victims of communist regimes. Guests will learn from country representatives about each nation's experience under communism as well as their unique history, culture, and traditions. Our program will include remarks by Rep. Ben Toma, Majority Leader in the Arizona House of Representatives who will speak about his experience living under the Ceaușescu regime in Romania, and Gary Powers Jr., son of Francis Gary Powers Sr., CIA U-2 pilot who was shot down in the midst of the Cold War while flying in Soviet airspace.

Tuesday, November 7

4:00 - 8:00 PM

Victims of Communism Museum

900 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005

Register at victimsofcommunism.org/events

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**Our work is made possible
by the generosity of our
donors who value our
mission. We are grateful
for your support which
enables us to fight the
rise of communism around
the world.**