

MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Baroness Catherine Ashton of Upholland
Vice-President/High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
European External Action Service
1046 Brussels
Belgium

CC: Karel De Gucht
Commissioner for Trade
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, 11 July, 2013

Honourable High Representative,
Baroness Catherine Ashton,

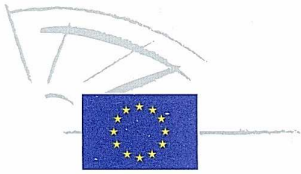
We are writing to you to share our concerns about the deteriorating situation of human rights in Vietnam. This year, approximately 50 human rights defenders and democracy activists have been convicted and imprisoned. They have been subject to arbitrary detention, intimidation, interrogation, and denial of legal rights.

The government continues to limit religious practices and to suppress independent religious organizations. Representatives of Vietnam's diverse religious groups are facing forced renunciation of faith, confiscation and destruction of church property and, in some cases, imprisonment.

Recently, we have witnessed escalating arrests of bloggers. Despite numerous calls by the international community, including the European Parliament¹, the government continues to limit freedom of speech and censor the web. It has targeted online activities by spreading malware to spy on Internet users, blocking access to websites, and sponsoring cyber attacks against Vietnamese-language websites hosted outside the country.

The country is witnessing a breakdown in the rule of law. Human rights activists are being arrested on questionable charges, often based on the articles of the Penal Code which refer to "subversion of the people's

¹ European Parliament resolution of 18 April 2013 on Vietnam, in particular freedom of expression

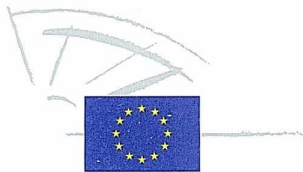


administration" and "conducting propaganda against the state". In addition, the Vietnamese law authorizes "administrative detention" without trial. There have been cases where the government has charged high-profile dissidents with non-political charges, such as "tax evasion". The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has already ruled that the arrest and detention of political activists, including members of Viet Tan, are in violation of international law.

In view of the above, we ask you to pursue the following actions:

- 1) Call for the release of political prisoners, among them attorneys Cu Huy Ha Vu and Le Quoc Quan; bloggers Dieu Cay, Ta Phong Tan and Paulus Le Son; land rights activists Tran Thi Thuy; musician Viet Khang; writer Vi Duc Hoi; pastors Duong Kim Khai, Nguyen Cong Chinh and Buddhist monk Thich Quang Do; students Nguyen Phuong Uyen and Dinh Nguyen Kha; and other human rights activists sentenced in the recent years, and in particular since the beginning of this year;
- 2) Advocate a more active EU role in supporting Vietnam's civil society. The Delegation of the European Union to Vietnam should continue to meet and support genuine grassroots organizations, in particular those furthering social and legal reforms, democracy and human rights. In addition, meeting human rights activists and their relatives and visiting those who are in prison is of utmost importance.
- 3) Insist that the Government of Vietnam carry out a legal reform and repeal the articles of the Penal Code which have facilitated arbitrary arrests of human rights activists. Furthermore insist that the Government of Vietnam pass a law which would protect the right to peaceful protests, to assemble, to exercise free speech, and to form social and political organizations. Finally, the issue of human rights lawyers losing their licences to practice should be raised.
- 4) Further integrate human rights concerns into talks with Vietnam: insist on human rights progress prior to any high level delegations to Vietnam, raise the issues outlined above during EU-Vietnam human rights dialogues and re-iterate the human rights conditionality of the EU external relations, including trade, with third countries.²

² The EU should respect its commitments made on 25 June 2012 in the Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy to insert human rights in all the EU external policies, including trade. The implementation of the Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy should be reviewed, therefore, also in the context of EU-Vietnam relations and reflected in the second part of the EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World due to be released in September 2013.



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Yours sincerely,

Members of the European Parliament

Graham Watson
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