



Associated Vietnamese
Writers in Exile Centre

EFF ELECTRONIC FRONTIER FOUNDATION
DEFENDING YOUR RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL WORLD



Vietnamese League for
Human Rights

August 27, 2012

Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung
Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Office of the State
1 Bach Thao
Hanoi, Vietnam

Re: Request for the immediate release of 17 Vietnamese social activists and bloggers and the withdrawal of all charges

Dear Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung,

As you receive this letter, seventeen Vietnamese social activists, including bloggers and citizen journalists have been in jail for up to a year. Most have not even been brought to trial. These seventeen individuals have been arbitrarily detained because of their work as citizen journalists, environmental advocates, anti-corruption crusaders and human rights defenders.

Over the last year, the international human rights community has gotten to know their names: Dang Xuan Dieu, Ho Duc Hoa, Paulus Le Van Son, Nguyen Van Duyet, Nong Hung Anh, Nguyen Van Oai, Chu Manh Son, Dau Van Duong, Tran Huu Duc, Nguyen Xuan Anh, Ho Van Oanh, Thai Van Dung, Tran Minh Nhat, Ta Phong Tan, Tran Vu Anh Binh, Nguyen Dinh Cuong, and Hoang Phong.

These individuals have simply sought to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association guaranteed under international law. What they have in common is a passion for social justice, religious freedom, and involvement in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

Unfortunately, they have been detained pursuant to vague, ill-defined statutes under the Vietnamese penal code: Article 79, which effectively restricts freedom of association and Article 88, which essentially limits freedom of speech. The recent petition filed by Stanford Law School's Allen Weiner to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention argued very well that their continued detention violates international law.

On March 12, 2012 nine international NGOs (ACAT France, Access, ARTICLE 19, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Front Line Defenders, Index On Censorship, Media Defence South East Asia, Media Legal Defence Initiative, Southeast Asian Press Alliance) sent you a letter which called for their immediate release and access to legal counsel. Since then, their situation has not improved but rather worsened: Four of these activists have been unjustly sentenced to prison terms and the remainder are being held without access to a lawyer. Blogger Paulus Le Son was transferred to Hoa Lo jail in Hanoi which is known for its harsh prison conditions. Another citizen journalist, Dang Xuan Dieu, has not been allowed a single family visitation over the last year.

We respectfully remind you of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's obligations under international law to protect the rights of its citizens when it ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

These rights are also protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is a matter customary international law. Therefore, freedom of association, freedom of speech and the right to a fair trial are basic rights which should be protected under Vietnam's legal system and not unjustifiably curtailed.

We believe Vietnam as a country would benefit from greater respect for the civil liberties of its citizens and Vietnamese society would be richer with the contributions of all its citizens. We urgently call on your government to withdraw all the charges against those who are held pending trial and for those who have been sentenced to be unconditionally exonerated.

Sincerely,

Christine Laroque, Asia Programs Manager, ACAT France

Brett Solomon, Executive Director, Access Now

Nguyen Ngoc, Associated Vietnamese Writers in Exile Centre

Jillian York, Director for International Freedom of Expression, Electronic Frontier Foundation

Kamila Shamsie, Writers at Risk Committee Co-Chair, English PEN

Mary Lawlor, Director, Front Line Defenders

Phil Robertson, Deputy Director, Asia Division, Human Rights Watch

Rohan Jayasekera, Deputy CEO, Index on Censorship

H.R. Dipendra, Executive Director, Media Defence – Southeast Asia

Peter Noorlander, Executive Director, Media Legal Defence Initiative

Gayathry Venkiteswaran, Executive Director, Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA)

Nguyen Le Nhan Quyen, Vietnamese League for Human Rights

CC:

ASEAN Chair, the Kingdom of Cambodia

Attn.: H.E. Samdech Hun Sen

Australian Embassy, Hanoi

Attn.: HE Mr. Hugh Borrowman

British Embassy, Hanoi

Attn.: Dr Antony Stokes

Embassy of Canada, Hanoi

Attn.: Her Excellency Deborah Chatsis

Embassy of France, Hanoi

Attn.: H.E Jean-François Girault

Royal Norwegian Embassy, Hanoi

Attn.: H.E. Ståle Torstein Risa

Embassy of Switzerland, Hanoi

Attn.: H.E Andrej Motyl

Embassy of the United States, Hanoi

Attn.: Ambassador David Shear

General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union

Attn.: High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Catherine Ashton

United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Attn.: Assistant Secretary Michael Posner