



CHRIS HAYES MP- Adjournment – Vietnam: Human Rights

24 November 2016

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (11:48): I rise to bring to the House's attention a string of human rights violations in Vietnam involving the detention of three prominent activists and bloggers: Ms Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, Mr Nguyen Van Dai and Ms Can Thi Theu.

I was informed that Ms Quynh was arrested on 10 October for speaking up for victims of the environmental issues which led to a mass killing of fish earlier this year. Signs supporting the victims were used as evidence by local authorities to charge her with conducting propaganda against the state under article 88 of the Vietnamese criminal code. A co-founder of the independent Vietnamese Bloggers' Network, Ms Quynh is a prominent blogger under the pen name Mother Mushroom and has regularly posted articles regarding human rights violations in Vietnam. Throughout this year, she has written extensively about the chemical spill caused by the Formosa Ha Tinh steel plant which led to the annihilation of fish stocks across four provinces in Vietnam. Ms Quynh is currently in custody and has not been granted access to her lawyer, her family or medical care. State-run media report that she is being prosecuted for using Facebook to post and sharing articles which are critical of the state.

With respect to prominent human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai, I understand he has still not received a trial date despite being arrested in December last year. Mr Dai has been similarly charged under article 88. I spoke to his wife, Ms Vu Minh Khanh, when she visited Australia earlier this year. She has been denied access to her husband ever since his arrest and Mr Dai has not had access to a lawyer. Ms Vu was also detained for several hours by police at Noi Bai airport in Hanoi when she

returned from her visit to Australia. Mr Dai was arrested while on his way to meet with the European Union delegation who were involved in the bilateral human rights dialogue the previous day. He previously served four years in prison for his work in human rights law and has conducted several training sessions in Vietnam regarding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and constitutional law. A cofounder of the Brotherhood for Democracy and the Vietnamese Human Right Centre, he was attacked the week before his arrest for conducting human rights seminars in the Nghe An Province. His colleague Le Thu Ha was also arrested and interrogated along with him.

More recently, I have been told that the well-known land rights activist Ms Can Thi Theu was sentenced to 20 months in prison after being charged with causing public disorder under article 245 of the penal code. Ms Theu has been actively motivating women in rural farming communities and has spoken up regarding both the Formosa environmental issue and arrest of Nguyen Van Dai. This is the second time that she has been arrested for drawing attention to government initiated land evictions having previously been sentenced to 15 months prison in 2014. At her trial her son, Trinh Ba Phuong, and other supporters were removed by local police. Ms Theu's health is of great concern, particularly given the fact that she undertook a series of hunger strikes since her arrest. Mr Phuong, her son, has been denied permission by prison authorities to send his mother necessary medications. She has been unable to see her family since her arrest in June this year. I have been informed that her appeal has been set down for 30 November. I would strongly urge authorities to consider the immediate and unconditional release of this human rights activist.

This series of arbitrary arrests, along with many other cases of people being detained for exercising their basic human rights, is indicative of a government that is tightening the civil liberties of its people. On the eve of International Human Rights Day and given Australia's obligations under a number of international human rights treaties, I believe we have a moral responsibility to speak out against human rights abuses wherever they occur.