

# VIET NAM, MOVE BEYOND REPRESSION.

***We strongly urge the Vietnamese authorities to cease their crackdown on independent media and those who express dissent and to protect and promote the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, and information, in line with Viet Nam's obligations under international law.***

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We, the undersigned ten organizations and individuals, are deeply concerned by the Vietnamese authorities' escalating crackdown on independent media and peaceful dissent ahead of the Vietnamese Communist Party's next Congress in early 2021.

While the Vietnamese government has been widely lauded for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher international standing comes greater obligations: Viet Nam must improve its appalling human rights record.

*Now is the prime opportunity for Viet Nam to grow.*

We are particularly troubled by the arrests of at least 11 prisoners of conscience<sup>1</sup> that have taken place in June 2020, including:

- Land rights activists **Can Thi Theu**, her two sons **Trinh Ba Tu** and **Trinh Ba Phuong**, and **Nguyen Thi Tam**, who have criticized alleged illegal government land grabs at Duong Noi and Dong Tam; human rights activist **Vu Tien Chi**; Facebook user **Nguyen Thi Cam Thuy**; and
- **Le Huu Minh Tuan**, one of the youngest members of Viet Nam's Independent Journalists Association. Behind bars, he joins the organization's vice president **Nguyen Tuong Thuy** and prominent former member **Pham Chi Thanh**, who were both arrested in May 2020, and the organization's president **Pham Chi Dung**, who was arrested in November 2019.

According to state media, all the individuals named above are being held under Article 117 of the 2015 Penal Code for "making, storing, and spreading information, materials, and items for the purpose of opposing the State of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam," which carries a prison sentence of up to 20 years.

These arrests represent a further grave escalation in the Vietnamese government's longstanding intolerance for dissent and its harassment of human rights defenders, activists, and journalists. Independent media and civil society groups — including the **Liberal Publishing House** and the **Independent Journalists Association** — have been under sustained crackdown since the end of 2019, further imperilling the environment for free expression in Viet Nam.

We are also alarmed at the threats faced by individuals such as **Pham Doan Trang**, an internationally recognized author who is being targeted solely on the basis of peacefully and legitimately exercising her right to freedom of expression. On 24 June, Viet Nam's Ministry of Public Security explicitly referred to

Pham Doan Trang's written works as "anti-state propaganda," and on 10 July, she was forced to dissociate from Liberal Publishing House in order to preserve the safety of its members. She is currently in hiding, and her risk of arrest remains extremely high.

We remind the Vietnamese authorities that as a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), it is obliged to protect, promote, and fulfill the rights to free expression, opinion, and information under article 19 of the ICCPR. After all, as highlighted in General Comment No. 34 of the UN Human Rights Committee, "[f]reedom of opinion and freedom of expression are indispensable conditions for the full development of the person" and "are essential for any society."

In this vein, *we strongly urge the Vietnamese authorities to:*

- 1. Cease its crackdown on the above individuals and organizations;*
- 2. Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience; and*
- 3. Respect, protect, and promote the human rights of all its citizens, in line with Viet Nam's obligations under international law.*

The government of Viet Nam has improved its international reputation in recent years, including through its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these efforts must not obscure the serious and systematic violations of human rights that are escalating ahead of the Communist Party Congress scheduled for January 2021.

The world is now expecting better of Viet Nam — it is time the country moves beyond repression.

**Amnesty International**

**Defend the Defenders**

***People In Need***

**Pen America**

**Safeguard Defenders**

**The 88 Project**

**VOICE**

**Vietnam Human Rights Network**

