

# Acclaimed Vietnam Journalist Pham Doan Trang Quits Publishing House After Harassment

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*Dissident Vietnamese blogger Pham Doan Trang is shown in an image provided by the website danlambao.*

Outspoken Vietnamese journalist and author Pham Doan Trang has withdrawn from an independent publisher of books on politics because of intense harassment by police over her work and the abduction and abuse of colleagues, she told RFA on Friday.

The Liberal Publishing House was founded in Ho Chi Minh City in February 2019 by a group of dissidents who wanted to challenge the authoritarian, one-party government's control of the publishing industry. Later that year, the government launched a targeted campaign aimed at shutting down the publisher and intimidating its writers and associates.

As part of the campaign, public security forces questioned at least 100 people across the country, and searched the homes of at least a dozen, confiscating books on democracy and public policy printed by the publishing house, according to Amnesty International.

Police also began abducting, detaining, and abusing people associated with the publisher, said Trang, a spokesperson and prominent author at the Liberal Publishing House with many titles under her name.

“There are many reasons, but one important reason is because Liberal Publishing House’s members must endure much suffering,” she said.

“Someone told me that our struggle is like suicide,” she added. “We only publish books, but Vietnamese authorities call it a crime and have directly confronted us, using force and causing much damage.”

Whenever authorities have arrested and beaten the publishing house members, they have been seriously injured, she said, citing the case of Phung Thuy, who was abducted and beaten by authorities in early May and is now almost physically disabled.

“He cannot move his hands or foot, and he shows signs of kidney failure and stomach bleeding,” she said.

His case was the focus of an appeal by London-based Amnesty International on May 14 to Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

### **'More and more violence'**

Trang wrote on her Facebook account that police have been harassing her for the past year, increasing their repression in September 2019 through this February, when they paused for the COVID-19 pandemic. They later resumed their activities with ferocity, she said.

“They arrested and tortured a shipper who delivered books published by Liberal Publishing House in Saigon on May 8,” she wrote, referring to Phung Thuy. “Since then, all members of LPH have been hunted down and abducted by police.”

Amid a spate of arrests and abuse of independent journalists this year in Vietnam, Trang told RFA in May that toleration of dissent was deteriorating and likely to get worse in the run-up to the ruling party congress next January.

“Freedom has always been restricted, but nowadays it seems to be narrower, and there’s more and more violence,” she said at the time. “From now until the party congress, the scope of freedom can be tightened more and more, and the suppression will increase.”

Trang, who released a well-regarded book titled *Politics for Everyone* under LPH, was awarded the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2019 Press Freedom Prize. She founded the online legal magazine *Luat Khoa* and edits another web-based rights journal called *thevietnamese*.

In June, the Geneva-based International Publishers Association (IPA) awarded LPH the 2020 Prix Voltaire for exemplary courage in upholding the freedom to publish and in enabling others to exercise the right to freedom of expression. The award carries a cash prize of 10,000 Swiss francs (U.S. \$10,650).

“The work of Liberal Publishing House in Vietnam as guerilla publishers, making books available in a climate of intimidation and risk for their own personal safety, is nothing short of inspirational,” said Kristenn Einarsson, chair of the IPA’s Freedom to Publish Committee, in a statement at the time.

***Reported by RFA's Vietnamese Service. Translated by Huy Le. Written in English by Roseanne Gerin.***