

Imprisoned Vietnamese Journalist Recognized With Human Rights Award

The Martin Ennals Award committee hailed Pham Doan Trang as an “inspirational” example for activists in Vietnam.



By [Sebastian Strangio](#)

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Jailed Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang, as seen in a photo posted on Facebook on February 1, 2020.

Credit: [Facebook/Pham Doan Trang](#)

The Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang, currently at the top end of a nine year prison sentence for “anti-state” activities, has been awarded the 2022 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, the award committee [announced yesterday](#).

Trang, who was garlanded along with Dr. Daouda Diallo from Burkina Faso and Bahrain’s Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja, was arrested in Ho Chi Minh City in October 2020, and [subsequently charged](#) under Article 117 of the Vietnamese penal code for conducting “propaganda against the State.” Last month, she was convicted and [sentenced](#) to nine years in prison.

The [Martin Ennals Award](#), which “honors individuals and organizations that have shown exceptional commitment to defending and promoting human rights, despite the risks involved,” is due recognition for Trang’s long track

record of advocacy in one-party Vietnam. As the co-founder of the dissident blog Luat Khoa Tap Chi (Journal of Law) and several other independent media outlets, Trang was for years prior to her arrest outspoken on a range of issues relating to human rights, democratic rights, and environmental protection.

She was particularly critical of the official narrative of the high-profile land dispute at the village of Dong Tam in northern Vietnam, which culminated with the [sentencing of two brothers to death](#) and 27 other villagers to prison terms following a violent clash with police in January 2020.

“In an environment that challenges the very existence of investigative journalism, her unique entrepreneurial initiatives to establish multiple media outlets (such as the Luat Khoa and Liberal Publishing House) were inspirational to many,” the Martin Ennals Award said in [a statement](#) unveiling its 2022 laureates.

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As Stewart Rees of the 88 Project, a not-for-profit organization that works to promote freedom of expression in Vietnam, wrote for The Diplomat last month, Trang’s conviction and sentencing [capped off a dire year](#) for critics and reformers in Vietnam. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Vietnam had the [fourth highest number](#) of imprisoned journalists of any nation in 2021.

Since her arrest, there have been concerns about Trang’s health. According to Amnesty International, she was [held incommunicado](#) from more than a year after her arrest, during which she was denied access to her family and any legal representation.

Having been arrested several times before for taking part in various protests, Trang was not

surprised when the authorities came for her on October 6, 2020, just hours after the conclusion of an annual human rights dialogue conference with the United States government. In a letter that she wrote in May 2019 and [requested be released](#) in the event of her detention, she told other activists to take advantage of her imprisonment to negotiate for more freedom in Vietnam, and to “advocate for the others first, then me.”

“I don’t want freedom for myself: that’s too easy,” she wrote. “I want something greater: freedom for Vietnam.”

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