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Repression

In Vietnam, a famous journalist sentenced to nine years in prison

Activist for press freedom and human rights, Pham Doan Trang, 43, had been harassed for years by the Vietnamese authorities.



Pham Doan Trang has been arrested 25 times since 2015. (DR)

by [Margot Davier](#)

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"Just in case I'm imprisoned, blogger Pham Doan Trang wrote in 2019, I don't want freedom for myself alone: it's too easy. I want something bigger: freedom for Vietnam." The 43-year-old journalist and activist knew she had been in the crosshairs of the authorities of her country for many years. On Tuesday, she was sentenced to nine years in prison by a court in Hanoi, accused among other things of *"disseminating propaganda against the socialist republic of Vietnam"*.

According to judge Chu Phung Ngoc, she displayed *"behaviour dangerous to society"*, with *"the intention of violating the socialist regime"*. As a result, she had to be *"severely punished"*. According to the documents provided by the prosecution, the government accuses Pham Doan Trang of having illegally stored and disseminated several reports, one concerning an ecological disaster, another on freedom of religion in Vietnam, and the third on the human rights situation. The Vietnamese state also disapproves of his participation in a round table for the Vietnamese edition of the BBC and an interview with Radio Free Asia Vietnam.

"Prolific blogger Pham Doan Trang is facing harsh government retaliation for a decade spent advocating for free speech, press freedom and human rights. By pursuing it, the Vietnamese authorities are showing how much they fear critical and popular voices," Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

Stopped 25 times

The sentence pronounced against Pham Doan Trang closes years of commitment, but above all years of persecution on the part of the Vietnamese regime. Her career as a journalist began in state media, which she quickly left to take part in peaceful protests against government policies. Her first arrest dates back to 2009, when she was detained for nine days, on *"national security"* grounds. She then finds herself under house arrest.

During her hearing, Pham Doan Trang said she had been arrested 25 times since 2015, and *"terrorized"* by the police. In fact, in April 2015, she took part in a pro-environmental demonstration in Hanoi and found herself injured by the security forces. The following year, [US President Barack Obama, visiting Hanoi](#), invited him to join a gathering of activists. The police arrest him and prevent him from attending. The same year, she wrote many times about one of the worst ecological disasters in Vietnam: a spill of toxic products that had caused the death of several tons of fish. In November 2017, she was arrested for having met with a delegation from the European Union.

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In her book *Policies of a Police State* ("Les Politiques d'un Etat police", not translated into French), she had denounced the incessant harassment she suffered, returning in particular to the dissemination without her knowledge of intimate photographs taken on her computer. His last arrest dated back to October 6, 2020, in Ho Chi Minh City. Transferred to Hanoi, she had since been in pre-trial detention, without a lawyer. According to Human Rights Watch, [which demanded on Monday her release](#) and the dropping of the charges against her, the charges against her and the ill-treatment suffered in prison violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Vietnam ratified in 1982. .

Prohibited tests

If Pham Doan Trang bothers the Vietnamese authorities so much, it is also because she has always supported certain subjects: the rights of LGBT + people, environmental issues, the territorial dispute between Vietnam and China, police violence, the repression of activists and the defense of human rights. In 2019, she became editor-in-chief of the online magazine *Luat Khoa Tap Chi* (*The Vietnamese* in its English version), which precisely documents all human rights violations in Vietnam. She also co-founded the publishing house *Liberal Publishing House*, which publishes essays – banned by the government –, which she left in 2020.

She has often spoken to her readers, asking them to use social media purposefully to create a thriving, nonviolent civil society movement. At least 146 people are currently being held for exercising their basic rights in Vietnam, where two other activists are due to stand trial this week, according to Human Rights Watch.