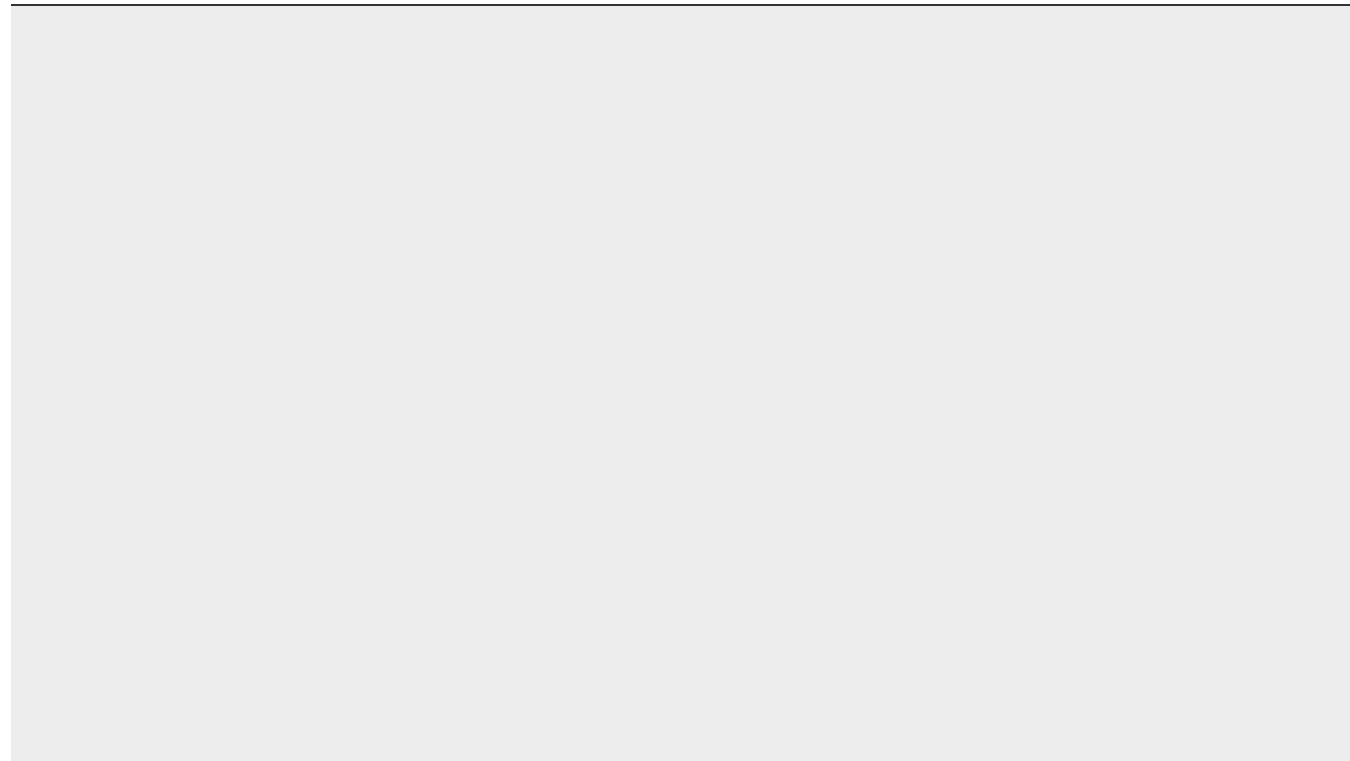


Vietnam: crackdown on critical expression continues as Pham Doan Trang sentenced to nine years in prison

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Pham Doan Trang

14 December 2021: PEN International strongly condemns the sentencing to nine years in prison of author, journalist and human rights activist Pham Doan Trang .

Today the People’s Court of Hanoi sentenced Trang to nine years in prison for “conducting propaganda against the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” under Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code.

Responding to the sentencing, Ma Thida, Chair of PEN International’s Writers in Prison Committee, said: *“This is a reprehensible outcome in a reprehensible case. An act of retaliation aimed at silencing Pham Doan Trang, and at punishing her for the work she has been doing in the name of human rights and freedom of expression, and for speaking uncomfortable truths. She should be immediately and unconditionally freed and all charges against her should be dropped.”*

Trang was arrested by the Vietnamese police in Ho Chi Minh City on 6 October 2020. She was held incommunicado from the date of her arrest until October 19, 2021, when she was finally allowed to meet with a lawyer. During this time, she was denied access to adequate medical care, raising serious health concerns in relation to pre-existing conditions such as chronic pain, due to her legs being broken by the police in 2015, and low blood pressure.

On 25 October 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) issued Opinion No. 40/2021

concerning Trang. The WGAD found her detention to be arbitrary and called for her immediate release. Prolonged incommunicado detention is a form of ill-treatment, prohibited by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Vietnam has ratified.

Trang was charged under Art. 117 of the Vietnamese Penal Code, for a “Making, storing, spreading information, materials, items for the purpose of opposing the State of Socialist Republic of Vietnam”.

PEN International has repeatedly called for the release of Trang, and the quashing of all charges against her, alongside the United Nations and other international organizations.

Trang is a prolific author, journalist and leading activist, and has addressed a wide range of human rights issues, including LGBT rights, women’s rights, land rights and freedom of expression. Her work includes Chính trị bình dân (Popular Politics), Cẩm nang nuôi tù (Handbook on Supporting Prisoners), Phản kháng phi bạo lực (Non-Violent Opposition).

Trang has long been involved in peaceful protests against government policies. In May 2019, Pham Doan Trang drafted a letter to be circulated in the eventuality she was ever jailed. The letter can be found [here](#).

More recently, she used one of her reports to shed light on the circumstances surrounding the controversial land dispute in the Dong Tam village, which resulted in the deaths of three policemen and the trial of 29 local villagers.

Trang’ sentencing is the latest example of the Vietnamese authorities escalating crackdown on critical expression in the country. Numerous writers and bloggers have been detained for their writing, including Pham Chi Thanh (also known as Phạm Thành), who in July 2021 was sentenced to five years and six months imprisonment in retaliation for his writing, which criticised Nguyen Phu Trong, the General Secretary of Vietnam’s ruling Communist Party.

PEN International reiterates its calls for the immediate release of Pham Doan Trang, and of all authors, journalists and human rights defenders unjustly detained in Vietnam.

Note to editors:

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