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Viet Nam: Crackdown on dissent continues with 'egregious' nine-year sentence for Pham Doan Trang

Responding to the sentencing of human rights defender and journalist Pham Doan Trang to nine years in prison, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for Campaigns Ming Yu Hah said:

“It is outrageous that the Vietnamese authorities are convicting Pham Doan Trang, a courageous journalist and human rights defender, who has for years fought for a just, inclusive, and rights-respecting Viet Nam. Her work should be celebrated and protected, not punished and criminalized.

“Pham Doan Trang is a leading voice for human rights in the country. She has stood up for arbitrarily detained activists, written about man-made environmental disasters and most recently challenged the official narrative of the deadly Dong Tam village raid. She has knowingly done so with grave risks to herself.

“The treatment of Pham Doan Trang – encompassing harassment, surveillance, threats, torture and bogus prosecutions – is cruelly emblematic of the Vietnamese authorities' repression of peaceful human rights activism across the country.



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Ming Yu Hah, Deputy Regional Director for Campaigns

“It is especially egregious that the court is using Pham Doan Trang’s human rights reports and her interviews with international media as evidence of her supposed crimes. These proceedings make a mockery of justice and constitute a clear assault on all human rights defenders in Viet Nam.

“Though behind bars, Pham Doan Trang still inspires countless Vietnamese activists with her widely circulated writings, courage in the face of reprisals, and dogged attempts to get to the truth in a country where authorities tightly control access to information.

“Amnesty International calls for the immediate release not only of Pham Doan Trang but of all unjustly detained human rights defenders in Viet Nam, including land rights defenders Trinh Ba Phuong, Nguyen Thi Tam, and activist Do Nam Trung, all of whom are expected to go on trial this week in Viet Nam.”

Background

Independent journalist and celebrated human rights defender Pham Doan Trang was sentenced to nine years by The People’s Court of Hanoi on 14 December 2021. She was arrested in Ho Chi Minh City on 7 October 2020, and charged under Article 88 of the 1999 Criminal Code which criminalizes “making, storing, distributing or disseminating information, documents and items against the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.”

On 25 October 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) issued Opinion No. 40/2021 concerning Pham Doan Trang. The WGAD found her detention to be arbitrary and called for her immediate release.

On 20 October, 20 human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, **called for**

Pham Doan Trang's immediate and unconditional release.

Pham Doan Trang was held incommunicado from the time of her arrest until 19 October 2021, when she was finally allowed to meet with one of her lawyers after having been denied access to her family and legal representation for over a year.

Prolonged incommunicado detention is a form of prohibited ill-treatment under international law under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Viet Nam has ratified.

The indictment in Pham Doan Trang's case includes as evidence several of her published works on environmental and human rights issues, as well as two interviews she gave to Radio Free Asia and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Pham Doan Trang is the author of multiple books that address everything from LGBT issues and women's rights to activism, environmental concerns and land rights. In 2019, Reporters Without Borders awarded her a Press Freedom Prize in recognition of her impact. Her work on the Liberal Publishing House helped it receive the prestigious Prix Voltaire award in 2020 for its continued coverage in spite of risks and dangers of reprisals.

Foreseeing her own arrest, she **gave instructions ahead of time** for fellow activists to take advantage of her imprisonment to negotiate for more freedom in Viet Nam, and to "advocate for the others first, then me."

Vietnamese authorities have regularly used Article 88 (and later Article 117) of the Criminal Code to punish human rights defenders, independent journalists and writers, and others who have peacefully exercised their human rights, as Amnesty International has **previously documented**.

On 24 June 2020, land rights defenders Trinh Ba Phuong and Nguyen Thi Tam were arrested for reporting and speaking up about the Dong Tam village raid, in which a clash led to an 84-year-old village leader and three police officers being killed. Authorities also arrested dozens of villagers for the high-profile land dispute between the government and the local community.

On 6 July 2021, activist Do Nam Trung was arrested for mocking and criticizing the government. Besides being vocal about human rights and democracy, Do Nam Trung has helped rescue victims of areas negatively affected by floods and landslides and calls for

thousands of drivers to boycott toll booths that have been placed at the wrong places. Since their arrest, none of them have been allowed to meet their family members.