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**Vietnam**

## **Bullied reporter who absolutely refuses to remain silent**

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**Pham Doan Trang has been messing with the autocratic unity party in Vietnam for 20 years - and is now paying for it with nine years in prison.**

By David Pfeifer



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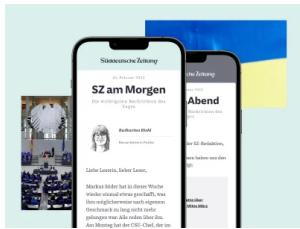


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To press

Nothing had been heard or read from Pham Doan Trang, 43, for a year. The Vietnamese journalist and activist was arrested and detained at her home in Hoh Chi Minh City in October 2020, just hours after the annual US-Vietnam human rights dialogue ended. She was taken to Hanoi and placed in solitary confinement. A year later she was allowed to speak to her lawyer. A trial followed, about which little has leaked out in recent weeks, except for the charge: "propaganda against the state of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" under Article 88 of the 1999 Criminal Code. She has now been sentenced to nine years in prison.



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Until her arrest, Pham Doan Trang wrote mostly about politics and social justice issues. In 2000 she started working for the early internet magazine *VnExpres* . She switched to web TV stations and wrote books, including ones about discrimination against homosexuals in Vietnam. She was the founder of the independent magazine *Luat Khoa* and an editor at *The Vietnamese Magazine* .

### Freedom of the press is particularly bad in Vietnam

Her colleagues there set up a portrait page for Pham Doan Trang shortly after her arrest. There she tells about her youth. "I borrowed my friends' song-books to copy the *Beatles* , in bad English and with even worse grammar... But that's how I grew up - with the Beatles." She studied international economics and discovered the internet. "We didn't have many books back then, and our reality didn't correspond to the books anyway," she says of the on-line development of her political consciousness. "For the more diligent among us, foreign economic articles - either in other languages or translated into Vietnamese - were an excellent source of information."



Vietnam

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By Arne Perras

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York, Vietnam, with at least 23 media workers in prison, is one of the countries in which the most reporters are imprisoned. Vietnam ranks 175th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' global [press freedom rankings](#). Pham Doan Trang has been repeatedly beaten, kidnapped, arrested and placed under house arrest in recent years. She was injured so badly that she is limping and using crutches after an operation.

### **your biggest fear? writing something wrong**

In May 2016, she was prevented by police from attending a meeting with US President Barack Obama. Since 2017, she has frequently changed her whereabouts. That didn't stop her, "I was afraid of many things, but my biggest fear was writing something wrong". She is not only committed to minorities, but also to environmental protection. In January 2020, Pham Doan Trang commented on a conflict in which three police officers and a village chief were killed. It involved building a military airport on farmland claimed by villagers on the outskirts of Hanoi. Two other activists involved in the case are now also on trial.

"Prolific author Pham Doan Trang faces harsh government reprisals for her decades-long commitment to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and human rights," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "With their persecution, the Vietnamese authorities are showing how much they fear popular critical voices." Pham Doan Trang has said, "If you're a Vietnamese journalist, there are many reasons to be sad. But if you want peace of mind, maybe you shouldn't be a journalist."

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To press