

Vietnam: Pham Doan Trang becomes an honorary member of the German PEN

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Pham Doan Trang

Photo: Thinh Nguyen / Luat Khoa

Press release, Darmstadt, May 18, 2021. The German PEN Center appoints the independent journalist Pham Doan Trang as an honorary member and calls for her immediate release. She is considered one of the most prominent critics of the Vietnamese government and was arrested at her home in Ho Chi Minh City on October 6, 2020. She faces up to 20 years in prison for alleged propaganda against the state.

"Vietnam is one of the countries in the world where freedom of expression is particularly severely restricted. The Communist Party persecutes media workers with relentless severity, so Trang has been banned from contact with her family and her lawyer. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of our honorary member Pham Doan Trang and assure her of our full solidarity," said Ralf Nestmeyer, Vice President and Writers-in-Prison Officer of the German PEN.

Pham Doan Trang founded the online magazine Luật Khoa and is an editor at thevietnamese. Both media make it easier for Vietnamese citizens to understand the country's laws, defend their rights and oppose the authoritarian rule of the Communist Party. A month before her arrest, Trang published a report for which she had researched a violent police raid on a village on the outskirts of Hanoi, where residents were resisting the authorities' confiscation of their land.

Because of her work, Trang was repeatedly targeted by the Vietnamese authorities. In August 2018, she was beaten in police custody and required hospital treatment. In prison, she is now at risk of being abused again. In 2014 she was a Feuchtwanger Fellow at Villa Aurora in Los Angeles and in 2019 she received the Press Freedom Award for particularly effective journalism from Reporters Without Borders.

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With its headquarters in Darmstadt, the German PEN center is one of more than 150 writers' associations worldwide that are part of PEN International. PEN stands for Poets, Essayists, Novelists. The association, originally founded in England in 1921, has established itself as an advocate of free speech and is considered the voice of persecuted and oppressed writers. The German PEN accompanies literary life in the Federal Republic with initiatives and events. He takes a stand when he sees freedom of expression, no matter where, in danger. He gets involved when the spirit of his charter is violated in the social sphere.