

## PRESS FREEDOM

# Vietnamese Blogger Wins Press Freedom Award

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An international press freedom monitor has awarded Vietnamese journalist and blogger Pham Doan Trang a 2019 Press Freedom Prize for Impact.

“Pham Doan Trang is a true heroine given the situation of press freedom in Vietnam, where journalists and bloggers who do not toe the line of the current direction of the Communist Party face extremely severe repercussions,” said Daniel Bastard, who heads the Asia-Pacific Desk of Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

Trang, who has no fixed address, reports on civil rights issues in Vietnam, where she has been beaten and imprisoned twice.

Two other women received awards from the group Thursday night in Berlin. Saudi journalist Eman al Nafjan received the award for Courage and Maltese journalist Caroline Muscat received the prize for Independence.

### Founder of *Luât Khoa*

Trang’s prize is awarded to journalists whose work has led to concrete improvements in journalistic freedom, independence and pluralism, or to an increase in awareness of these matters, according to an RSF statement.

Trang founded *Luât Khoa*, an online magazine that specializes in providing information about legal issues, and she edits another, *The Vietnamese*, which helps citizens defend their rights and resist the Communist Party’s rule, RSF said.

Independent journalists and bloggers who report critically on sensitive issues face harassment or detention on anti-state charges, and at least 11 were behind bars as of Dec. 1, 2018, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), which ranks Vietnam sixth among the 10 countries where it deems journalists are most censored. Like Saudi Arabia, China and Iran, Vietnam is “especially adept at practicing these two brands of censorship: jailing and harassing journalists and their families, while also engaging in digital monitoring and censorship of the internet and social media,” according to a CPJ report.

### Colleague accepted award

Because Vietnamese authorities wanted to set conditions on Trang for her to leave the country to accept the award, which she said she would not consent to, her friend and colleague, Trinh Huu Long, editor-in-chief for *Luât Khoa* magazine, accepted the award on Trang's behalf.

"I hope this award will encourage the Vietnamese people to engage more in press freedom and to push Hanoi to improve the citizens' basic rights," Trang told VOA Vietnamese.

"I really wish it [will] encourage other journalists, including freelance journalists, to become more committed to pursuing truth, justice and human rights in Vietnam," said Trang, who was born in 1978.

"I hope this award can help gain more international recognition of the hidden wave under the so-called political stability in the country. Below that surface is a layer of waves of repression and silence," she added.

### **Grateful for RSF**

RSF said that the Vietnamese government tries to stifle Trang's voice through police intimidation, because she exposes its inconsistencies and its failure to guarantee civil and political rights.

Despite the major crackdown that began in 2016, Trang plays a crucial role in helping her fellow citizens gain access to independent information and enabling them to use the rule of law, as guaranteed by the Vietnamese constitution, against the arbitrary practices of the authorities, Bastard said.

"I believe that RSF's goals for giving the award are to let journalists around the world, especially journalists who are victims of persecution, harassment, abuse and persecution, [know they] are not alone in their fights," Trang said. "RSF has really helped people like me to feel I'm not alone."

Her books, such as *Politics for the Common People*, *A Handbook for Families of Prisoners* and *Politics of a Police State*, were all published outside Vietnam. They "received much more readership than I expected," Trang said.

Trang has been beaten by the police because of her work and was detained arbitrarily twice for several days in 2018, according to an RSF statement.

### **Two more women win**

Muscat dedicated her award to assassinated Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was killed by a car bomb just meters from her home in October 2017. The Council of Europe has given Malta a deadline to hold an independent public inquiry into the journalist's assassination, but with just days remaining, there is no sign that this will take place, according to *The Shift News*, which Muscat co-founded. The independent investigative news website focuses on combating corruption and defending press freedom.

Al Nafjan founded the blog *Saudi Woman*, which “features her reporting and opinions on the campaign to end the ban on women driving in the kingdom, as well as coverage of women’s rights issues, local elections, the Saudi anti-terror law and profiles of Saudi human rights activists,” according to CPJ.

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