

# Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang's health declines after a year of detention

Extreme stress and depression can cause a host of medical issues, a former political prisoner said.

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*An undated file photo of detained Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang*

Detained Vietnamese activist author Pham Doan Trang is in poor health after a year of pretrial detention, her lawyer said this week after meeting Trang for the first time since her arrest.

Pham Doan Trang was arrested in Ho Chi Minh City in October 2020 and charged under article 117 of the Vietnamese Penal Code, accused of “making, storing, distributing, or disseminating information, documents and items against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

With a trial date set for Nov. 4, one of the lawyers, Le Van Luan, was finally able to meet with Trang on Tuesday, and said in a Facebook post that Trang had lost 10 kilograms (22 pounds) over the past year.

In addition, her legs were in pain due to the changing weather’s effects on her knees, which were broken in an attack she suffered in 2015.

She also suffers from ovarian cysts and menorrhagia, a condition which has caused her periods to last as long as 15 days. The long periods and her low blood pressure have resulted in constant fatigue, Luan said, but she has not had proper medical checkups or treatment over the past year.

A former prisoner of conscience told RFA’s Vietnamese Service that Trang’s health issues might be related to living in constant stress for long periods.

“I witnessed some of my fellow inmates... suffer from menorrhagia. I don’t know how serious Trang’s menstrual problem is, but it’s definitely worrisome,” said Pham Thanh Nghien, who spent four years in a Vietnamese prison including 18 months in pretrial detention on charges of spreading propaganda against the state.

“When I was finally discharged, I went to see some doctors who told me that it can happen from excessive stress, worry or depression while in custody,” said Nghien.

Nghien said that most detention centers have clinics, but it is difficult for political prisoners to access medical exams and treatment.

“The pre-trial detention is the most stressful time because detainees have to deal with the interrogation and aren’t allowed to see their families. Those who are detained for political reasons are not even allowed to see their lawyers,” she said.

Trang, who authored a book on political engagement that angered authorities in Hanoi, was a cofounder of Legal Initiatives for Vietnam, a California-based NGO.

She also received Press Freedom Prize in 2019 from Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders for her work.

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Vietnam's already low tolerance of dissent deteriorated sharply last year with a spate of arrests of independent journalists, publishers, and Facebook personalities as authorities continued to stifle critics in the run-up to the ruling Communist Party Congress in January. But arrests continue in 2021.

***Reported by RFA's Vietnamese Service. Translated by Anna Vu. Written in English by Eugene Whong.***