

VIETNAM: Prominent Blogger Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh sentenced to 10 years in prison



PARIS-GENEVA, June 29, 2017 (The Observatory & VCHR) - The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (an FIDH-OMCT partnership) and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) condemn today's conviction and prison sentence against prominent blogger Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh aka Mother Mushroom and call for her immediate and unconditional release.

On June 29, 2017, the People's Court in Khanh Hoa Province sentenced **Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh** to 10 years in prison on charges of "conducting propaganda against the State" under Article 88 of Vietnam's Criminal Code.

"By jailing Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, the Vietnamese Government shows it is not serious about its stated commitment to upholding human rights. The reality is that Vietnam remains a dangerous country for human rights defenders and all those who peacefully criticize the Government," said FIDH President Dimitris Christopoulos.

Detained since October 10, 2016, Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh is one of the very first human rights defenders in Vietnam to have used the Internet and social media to document human rights violations committed by the Vietnamese authorities. Since her first arrest in 2009, she has relentlessly criticized the Government on a wide range of social and political issues.

In April 2016, she addressed the Government's mishandling of serious water pollution problems and the subsequent mass fish deaths caused by toxic waste discharged by the Taiwanese company Formosa Plastics in three coastal provinces. In an important document entitled "Stop Police Killing Civilians", Nhu Quynh exposed numerous

incidents of police brutality and alleged torture that resulted in the death of several individuals while in custody.

“The sentencing of Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh is outrageous and clearly illustrates the Government’s deliberate efforts to silence any dissenting voices in the country. We call for her immediate and unconditional release, as her detention merely aims at punishing her legitimate human rights activities,” said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

Because of her outspoken stance on human rights, her mother and other family members have been subjected to surveillance and harassment by the authorities. Detained incommunicado from October 2016 until June 2017, Nhu Quynh’s health has been seriously affected and she has had no opportunity to prepare her defence.

In an Opinion issued on May 30, 2017, the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) declared that Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh’s detention was arbitrary because it violated her rights to liberty; fair trial; freedom of expression; freedom of peaceful assembly; and freedom of association. The WGAD concluded that Nhu Quynh’s “arrest and detention was intended to restrict her activities as a human rights defender” (1). The WGAD called on the Vietnamese authorities to immediately release Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, and urged the Government to bring Article 88 of the Criminal Code in compliance with Vietnam’s international human rights obligations.

“Vietnam’s harsh sentence against Nhu Quynh and its relentless crackdown on human rights defenders is the result of the use of numerous repressive laws that must be urgently repealed. The Government must use the ongoing revision of the Criminal Code to repeal Article 88 and other draconian provisions,” said VCHR President Vo Van Ai.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and OMCT. The objective of this program is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

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(1) See UNWGAD Opinion A/HRC/WGAD/2017/27 adopted at its seventy-eight session, April 19-28, 2017, May 30, 2017