

Briefing paper for the 14th European Union (EU) – Vietnam human rights dialogue

29 June 2026

Since the previous EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue in July 2025, Vietnamese members of civil society, including human rights defenders, bloggers, journalists, lawyers, environmental rights activists, and freedom of religion advocates, have continued to be detained under overly broad and vaguely defined “national security” provisions of the 2015 Criminal Code, which are inconsistent with international human rights law.

This FIDH-VCHR briefing paper highlights the cases of 12 political prisoners who remain arbitrarily detained for the legitimate exercise of their rights to freedom of opinion, expression, association, assembly, and religion or belief.

In these cases, the most frequently invoked provisions of the 2015 Criminal Code to criminalise their peaceful activities included Article 117 on “making, storing, disseminating information, document, materials, items against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” and Article 331 on “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state, the legitimate rights and interests of organisations and/or citizens.” Some individuals were prosecuted prior to the entry into force of the current Criminal Code in 2018 under equivalent provisions (Articles 88 and 258, respectively) of the 1999 Criminal Code. All of them have been sentenced to long prison terms following trials that did not comply with fair trial standards. They are held in poor detention conditions, subjected to torture and ill-treatment, and denied adequate medical care.

Concerns regarding the Vietnamese government’s abuse of “national security” provisions have been compounded by the Ministry of Public Security’s proposed introduction of a new offence of “propaganda against the Communist Party of Vietnam” in the revised Criminal Code in May 2026, despite public opposition to the measure. The revised draft Criminal Code is expected to be released to the public in July 2026.

Trịnh Bá Phương

Land rights activist (expected release: 2042)



Land rights activist Trịnh Bá Phương is serving **21 years in prison** for exercising his right to freedom of expression. He was first arrested in June 2020 and sentenced to **10 years in prison** under Article 117 for denouncing the use of excessive police force to evict farmers in Dong Tam Village, near Hanoi. His mother, **Cần Thị Thêu**, and his brother, **Trịnh Bá Tư**, were sentenced to eight years in prison each for the same offence. In detention, Trịnh Bá Phương has been subjected to torture, ill-treatment, and frequent periods of solitary confinement.

In September 2025, while he was serving his sentence in An Diem Prison, in Quang Nam Province, he was charged with a second offence, again under Article 117, after wardens found a sheet of paper in his cell with the slogan “Down with the Communist Party, violator of human rights” and “Down with the court that convicted me.” He was sentenced to additional **11 years in prison** at an unfair trial that

lasted about three hours at the Danang City People’s Court. He was not allowed to make a statement, and his lawyers were not allowed to present their defence. Neither family members nor foreign diplomats were allowed to attend the three-hour trial. On 27 December 2026, the sentence was upheld on appeal. Since he must serve two sentences consecutively, Trịnh Bá Phương is not due for release until 2042.

Phạm Chí Dũng
Journalist and labour rights activist (expected release: 2034)

Phạm Chí Dũng is a prominent journalist and labour rights activist, founder of the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam (IJAVN). On 19 November 2019, he sent a video message to members of the European Parliament urging them to postpone ratification of the European Union (EU)-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), pending concrete human rights progress in Vietnam. Two days later, he was arrested. Police seized documents on his computer related to his advocacy activities with the EU.



After more than a year in pre-trial detention, in January 2021, he was sentenced to **15 years in prison** under Article 117 along with two other IJAVN members, **Nguyễn Thường Thụy** and **Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn**, who were sentenced to 11 years in prison each. Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn, detained in Xuyên Mộc Prison, is currently in very poor health, and has been denied adequate medical care.

Hoàng Đức Bình
Environmental and labour rights activist (expected release: 2031)



Hoang Đức Bình is an environmental and labour rights defender. He is detained for reporting on the environmental disaster caused by the Formosa steel plant in 2016, seeking to defend the fishing communities and advocating for the creation of an independent trade union. In May 2017, as he was escorting a group of environmental activists, police violently dragged him from his car and placed him under arrest.

In February 2018, Hoang Đức Bình was sentenced to **14 years in prison** on charges of “resisting persons in the performance of their official duties” and “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state” (formerly Articles 257 and 258 of the 1999 Criminal Code, now Articles 330 and 331 of the 2015 Criminal Code). In April 2018, his sentence was upheld on appeal. During his detention, Hoang Đức Bình was forced to share a cell with prisoners on death row, who physically attacked him several times.

Nguyễn Vũ Bình
Journalist (expected release: 2031)

Nguyễn Văn Bình is a journalist and former political prisoner. On 29 February 2024, he was arrested, and on 10 September 2024, he was sentenced to **seven years in prison** under Article 117. He was accused of making critical comments on political, economic, and social topics in videos posted on a *YouTube* channel “TNT Media Live” in January and March 2022.



Nguyễn Văn Bình was formerly a journalist at the Communist Party of Vietnam’s *Communist Review*. In 2003, he served a first seven-year prison sentence for “espionage” after he sent testimony to the United States

(US) Congress on human rights violations in Vietnam. From 2015 until his arrest in 2024, he worked as freelance journalist, writing about corruption, land rights, police brutality, unfair trials, the right to peaceful assembly, the economy, education, and the environment.

Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng

Freedom of religion activist (expected release: 2030)



Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng is a Protestant pastor, defender of human rights and freedom of religion. On 16 January 2025, he was arrested in a raid on his home in Ho Chi Minh City. Police confiscated his belongings, including phones and a laptop. He was accused of using social media to criticise the Communist Party of Vietnam, including for violations of land rights. On 30 October 2025, he was convicted under Article 117 and sentenced to **six years in prison** by Lâm Dong Provincial People’s Court. On 8 June 2026, he was sentenced to five years

and six months in prison in the appellate trial, a reduction of six months from his original sentence.

Pastor Nguyễn is a former soldier, associated with the Chuong Bo Protestant Church which is affiliated with the independent Mennonite Church. Neither is officially registered with the Vietnamese authorities, which is a requirement under Vietnam’s Law on Belief and Religion.

Phạm Đoan Trang

Writer and journalist (expected release: 2029)

Phạm Đoan Trang is a renowned writer, journalist, pro-democracy advocate, founder of the online magazine *Luật Khoa*, and editor of *The Vietnamese* English-language news site. She authored numerous in-depth reports on issues such as Sino-Vietnamese relations, the Formosa pollution disaster, the Dong Tam land conflict, LGBTIQ rights, and books including “Handbook for Prisoners’ Families,” “Politics for the ordinary people,” and “Strategies for non-violent resistance.” All her works are banned in Vietnam. She is the recipient of many international awards for her writings and advocacy.



In October 2020, Trang was arrested for “anti-state propaganda” under Article 88 of the 1999 Criminal Code (now Article 117 of the 2015 Criminal Code) and held incommunicado in pre-trial detention for almost a year. In December 2021, she was sentenced to **nine years in prison** at an unfair trial in Hanoi. She is detained in An Phuoc Prison, Binh Duong Province, 1,500 km away from her home. She suffers from low blood pressure and pain in her legs, which were seriously injured by police beatings during prior arrests. She has not received any medical care during her detention.

Nguyễn Chí Tuyến aka Anh Chí

Citizen journalist (expected release: 2029)



Nguyễn Chí Tuyến, also known by his pen name Anh Chí, is a citizen journalist and one of Vietnam’s most prominent rights activists. On 29 February 2024, he was arrested, and on 15 August 2024, he was sentenced to **five years in prison** under Article 117 for criticising the government on social media. Nguyễn Chí Tuyến founded one of Vietnam’s first independent civil society groups - the No-U Football Club - and was actively involved in causes ranging from independent publishing and environmental protection to land seizures and police accountability. He regularly travelled to visit political prisoners with their families, and mobilised fellow activists to provide humanitarian assistance to the rural poor and victims of natural disasters. He was the target of repeated police

intimidation, harassment, bans on international travel, arbitrary detention, and interrogations. Explaining his activism, he said: “The only thing we did was to act in accordance with our conscience, speak up our thoughts, our desire, our longing.”

Trần Thị Tuyết Diệu

Blogger (expected release: 2028)

Trần Thị Tuyết Diệu is a journalist and blogger. She worked at the State-run newspaper in Phú Yên Province until 2017, then became an independent journalist, using social media and online platforms to post stories about official corruption and other social issues. In 2020, she was arrested and charged with “defaming” the party’s leadership, and “slandering” revolutionary history.



On 22 March 2021, she was charged for violating Article 117. She pleaded innocence, saying that her blogs had harmed no-one. The court replied that they had “caused harm to the nation”. According to her lawyer, this is a tactic commonly used by the courts in Vietnam to avoid producing specific harmed persons as witnesses during trials. She was sentenced to **eight years in prison**. The verdict was upheld on appeal in September 2021.

Nguyễn Lâm Thắng

Independent journalist (expected release: 2028)



Nguyễn Lâm Thắng actively defended human rights in Vietnam for over a decade. As an independent journalist, he photographed and documented land evictions, demonstrations in favour of environmental protection, and other socio-political and human rights issues.

On 5 July 2022, he was arrested by the Investigation Bureau of the Hanoi police and accused of “defaming the Party and state” by publishing articles critical of the government on social media and giving interviews to the *BBC*. After nine months in pre-trial detention, he was charged under Article 117 and sentenced to **six years in prison** at a closed-door trial in Hanoi. For years, Nguyễn Lâm Thắng was the target of harassment and intimidation on account of his advocacy. He was arbitrarily detained, interrogated, placed under house arrest, banned from travelling, and subjected to frequent beatings by plainclothes police.

Ngô Thị Tố Nhiên

Environmental activist (expected release: 2027)

Ngô Thị Tố Nhiên is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Vietnam Initiative for Energy Transition Social Enterprise (VIETSE), a prominent think tank specialised in energy transition policy and climate change.



In September 2023, she was arrested, and in June 2024 she was sentenced to **three and a half years in prison** at a secret trial in Hanoi on charges of “stealing, buying, selling, or destroying the seal or documents of a state agency or organisation” under Article 342 of the Criminal Code. Police raided VIETSE’s offices in Hanoi and later forced the organisation to close and cease operations.

At the time of her arrest, she was working on the implementation plan for Vietnam’s Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), a 15.5 billion USD project funded by the G7 to help reduce the country’s reliance on fossil fuels. Ms. Nhiên’s detention has been widely denounced as arbitrary and politically motivated.

Định Thị Thu Thủy

Environmental activist (expected release: 2027)



Định Thị Thu Thủy is an environmental activist and an aquaculture engineer. An advocate of free expression, she used social media to criticise the government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Formosa pollution disaster and other social issues. She also posted satirical poems by her father on an anti-corruption drive launched by the Communist Party of Vietnam.

In April 2020, she was arrested on charges of “satirising and ridiculing” the Party leadership, and detained incommunicado in Hậu Giang Detention Centre for almost eight months, with no access to legal counsel. At an unfair trial in January 2021, she was sentenced to **seven years in prison** under Article 117. The only evidence brought against her were five Facebook posts. Định Thị Thu Thủy is currently detained in An Phước Prison in Bình Dương Province.

Trần Đình Triển

Lawyer (expected release: 2027)

Trần Đình Triển is a lawyer, former deputy chair of the Hanoi Bar Association (2013-2018), and founder of the law firm “Vì Dân” [For the People]. In June 2024, he was arrested and in January 2025 he was sentenced to **three years in prison** by a Hanoi court on charges of “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State” under Article 331. He was convicted for posting comments on social media criticising the chief justice of the Supreme Court and the restrictions on access to justice in Vietnam. The court said his posts “undermined the prestige of the state.” His licence to practice law has been suspended.



Trần Đình Triển is well-known for defending government critics, including victims of land disputes. In a letter to the National Assembly in 2016, he said that lawyers were routinely denied the right to meet their clients, making it difficult to prepare adequate defence. Moreover, he denounced that lawyers who defended dissidents were often accused by the authorities of being dissidents themselves, thus discouraging them from taking on sensitive cases and depriving activists of the right to legal protection.

Recommendations

FIDH and VCHR call on the EU to demand the Vietnamese government take all the necessary steps to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release all persons detained for the peaceful and legitimate exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and freedom of religion or belief.
- Cease arbitrary arrests and other attacks and acts of harassment against human rights defenders and other members of civil society activists, including government critics.
- Suspend the ongoing revision of the Criminal Code and ensure that its reform entails amending the vaguely worded “national security” provisions to bring them into line with international standards.
- Ensure that all persons deprived of their liberty are afforded the right to a fair trial, in conformity with Articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- Improve detention conditions in conformity with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (“Nelson Mandela Rules”).
- Thoroughly investigate all allegations of torture and ill-treatment and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that families of the victims receive reparation.