

Three independent journalists jailed for up to 15 years in Vietnam



From left to right: Nguyễn Tường Thụy, Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn and Phạm Chí Dũng at their trial in Ho Chi Minh City on 5 January 2021 (Photo AFP)

PARIS,

6 January 2021 (VCHR) - Vietnam has begun the New Year by sentencing three independent journalists to draconian prison terms at a trial in Ho Chi Minh City's People's Court that lasted only a few hours. Phạm Chí Dũng is condemned to 15 years in prison for *"making, storing, spreading information, materials, items for the purpose of opposing the State of Socialist Republic of Vietnam"*, (Article 117 of Vietnam's Criminal Code). This is the highest sentence ever handed down under Article 117. Two of his colleagues, Nguyễn Tường Thụy and Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn

were sentenced to 11 years each under the same charges.

These harsh sentences follow the entry into force of a Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and Vietnam (EVFTA) in August 2020. One of the most ambitious free trade deals ever concluded with a developing country, EVFTA provides for the almost complete (99%) elimination of customs duties between the two blocks. Facing opposition within the European Parliament (EP), the EU argued that EVFTA would provide leverage to improve the human rights situation in Vietnam.

“Barely five months after this landmark agreement took effect, Vietnam has pronounced some of the heaviest prison sentences ever for “anti-state propaganda”, said VCHR President Võ Văn Ái. “Phạm Chí Dũng was arbitrarily arrested simply for [urging the EP to seek concrete human rights progress in Vietnam before ratifying EVFTA](#). Hanoi is taking revenge today by shamefully flouting international law and betraying its own promises which the Europeans had the naivety - or hypocrisy - to believe”.

<https://youtu.be/KnzZQe3QDw0>

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) issued the following statement on the sentencing of Phạm Chí Dũng, Nguyễn Tường Thụy and Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn :



URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

VNM 003 / 1119 / OBS 097.1

Sentencing /
Arbitrary detention /
Judicial harassment
Vietnam
January 5, 2021

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), has received new information and requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **Vietnam**.

New information:

The Observatory has been informed by the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) about the sentencing of independent human rights journalists **Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy, and Le Huu Minh Tuan**. Pham Chi Dung, 55, is the founder of the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam (IJAVN), a civil society organisation that promotes the freedom of the press and the right to freedom of expression in Vietnam. Nguyen Tuong Thuy, 69, and Le Huu Minh Tuan, 31, are IJAVN members.

On January 5, 2021, the People's Court in Ho Chi Minh City found Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy, and Le Huu Minh Tuan guilty of "making, storing, spreading information, materials, items for the purpose of opposing the State" under Article 117 of the Criminal Code. Pham Chi Dung was sentenced to 15 years in prison and three years' house arrest. Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan were each sentenced to 11 years in prison and three years' house arrest.

The Observatory recalls that Pham Chi Dung has been [arbitrarily detained](#) since November 21, 2019, on charges of writing “anti-State articles” and “cooperating with foreign media to deliver distorted information”. In particular, he had sent a video message to members of the European Parliament urging them to postpone ratification of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) pending human rights progress in Vietnam. Shortly after his arrest, IJAVN’s website (www.vietnamthoibao.org) was shut down by the authorities. In 2012, Pham Chi Dung had been detained during six months over the same accusations. He was also frequently harassed by the authorities and was banned from traveling abroad in 2014. Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan were arrested on May 23 and June, 12, 2020, respectively, on charges under Article 117 of the Criminal Code.

The Observatory strongly condemns the sentencing and ongoing arbitrary detention of Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan, which seem to be only aimed at punishing them for the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

The Observatory calls on the Vietnamese authorities to quash the prison sentences of Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy, and Le Huu Minh Tuan, immediately and unconditionally release the three, and put an end to any acts of harassment, including at the judicial level, against them and all other human rights defenders in the country.

Actions requested:

Please write to the authorities of Vietnam asking them to:

- i. Guarantee, in all circumstances, the physical integrity and psychological well-being of Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan, and of all other human rights defenders in Vietnam;

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ii. Repeal the guilty verdict and immediately and unconditionally release Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan as their detention is arbitrary and merely aimed at punishing them for their human rights activities;

iii. Put an end to any harassment, including at the judicial level, against Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan, and all other human rights defenders in Vietnam, and ensure in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate activities without any hindrance or fear of reprisals.

Addresses:

· Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong, President of Vietnam; Email: webmaster@president.gov.vn

· Mr. Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of Vietnam; Email: nguoiphatngonchinhphu@chinhphu.vn

· Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam; Email: ttll.mfa@mofa.gov.vn

· Mr. Le Thanh Long, Minister of Justice of Vietnam; Email: btp@moj.gov.vn

· Mr. Mai Tien Dung, Minister, Office of the Government (OOG), Vietnam; Email: vpccp@chinhphu.vn

· Permanent Mission of Vietnam to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland; Email:

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info@vnmission-ge.gov.vn

· Embassy of Vietnam in Brussels, Belgium; Email: vnemb.brussels@skynet.be

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of Vietnam in your respective countries.

Paris-Geneva, January 5, 2021

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

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E-mail: Appeals@fidh-omct.org

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