

Vietnam: Party Congress cements repressive rule, rewards rights-abusive leaders



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(FIDH & VCHR) - The meeting of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) cements authoritarian rule and ushers in five more years of repression and human rights abuses, FIDH and its member organization Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) said today.

The CPV's 13th National Congress, which began on 25 January in Hanoi and ended today, picked the one-party state's leaders for the next five years. Vietnam's President Nguyen Phu Trong won his third consecutive term as CPV General Secretary and second term as President. Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc retained his post for a second term.

“While the international community has praised the Vietnamese government over its response to the pandemic, it has utterly failed to condemn it over the harshest crackdown on peaceful dissent in recent years. The international community’s muted reaction to the repression of peaceful dissent has emboldened the Communist Party of Vietnam to reward the country’s authoritarian leaders,” said FIDH Secretary-General

Adilur Rahman Khan.

In 2020, amid the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, authorities detained at least 33 individuals for the peaceful and legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of opinion and expression. During the same period, at least 23 individuals were sentenced to prison terms of up to 12 years. Those deprived of their liberty included human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and government critics. Nearly all of those detained or imprisoned in 2020 were charged under Articles 117 (“conducting anti-state propaganda”) or 331 (“abusing democratic freedoms”) of the Criminal Code.

In addition, at least five members of unregistered religious groups were detained on charges under Article 116 (“undermining the unity policy”), and 11 ethnic minority Hmong were sentenced to prison terms ranging from eight years to life on charges under Article 109 (“subversion”).

This repressive trend continued in the lead-up to the CPV Congress, with the imprisonment of four more individuals in the month of January 2021 alone. They include independent journalists Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy, and Le Huu Minh Tuan, who were [sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years](#) on 5 January, and aquaculture expert Dinh Thi Thu Tuy, sentenced to seven years in prison for “ridiculing” party and state leaders on her social media account on 20 January.

In addition to arbitrary arrests and detentions, authorities subjected human rights defenders and government critics to systematic acts of harassment, including surveillance and physical attacks. For example, on 8 May 2020, police in Ho Chi Minh City interrogated and severely beat Phung Thuy, aka Thuy Tuat, for delivering books for the independent Liberal Publishing House.

“The Communist Party’s 13th National Congress is a non-event. Its only purpose is to show that Vietnam will continue to violate human rights on a massive scale and stifle the democratic aspirations of its people. The ‘new’ leaders are the same men who have supervised the systematic repression of citizens who dared to assert their constitutional rights,” said VCHR President Vo Van Ai.

Vietnam holds at least 200 political prisoners. Many of them remain subjected to abusive and discriminatory treatment in prison, often amounting to torture. In November 2020, blogger Nguyen Van Hoa and religious freedom activist Nguyen Bac Truyen, serving prison sentences of seven and 11 years respectively, staged a hunger strike in An Diem Prison, Quang Nam Province, to denounce violations of prisoners’ rights, including beatings, solitary confinement, denial of medical care, and other acts of ill treatment.

Such treatment is in breach of Vietnam’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Vietnam is a state party to both treaties.

FIDH and VCHR reiterate their calls for: the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Vietnam; the repeal of all provisions of the Criminal Code that are inconsistent with the country’s obligations under international law; and an end to all acts of harassment against activists, human rights defenders, and government critics.

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