

EU-Vietnam: FIDH and VCHR submit a Complaint to EU Ombudsman

BRUSSELS-PARIS, 12 August 2014 (VCHR & FIDH) - In a **complaint** filed in Brussels on 7 August 2014, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisation Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR), requested that the EU Ombudsman address the European Commission's refusal to take human rights into account in negotiations for trade and investment agreements with Vietnam.

Negotiations on the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement are taking place against a **backdrop of intensifying repression in Vietnam**. In a fierce crackdown on freedom of expression, Vietnam prosecuted and imprisoned at least 65 bloggers and activists in 2013, and at least 14 more have been arrested in the first half of 2014. Scores of civil society activists were brutally beaten for staging peaceful demonstrations or holding human rights debates. Hundreds of dispossessed farmers were wounded and several others killed in massive protests over forced eviction and land confiscation.

"It is inadmissible that the European Commission is negotiating a Free Trade Agreement without any regard for human rights in Vietnam. Over the past year, human rights abuses have reached a climax. Top EU officials have repeatedly denounced the harsh sentences of bloggers and human rights defenders, yet the Commission proposes "business as usual" - and even upgrading trade relations with Vietnam. We call upon the Ombudsman to address this and help put human rights back at the centre of the EU-Vietnam relationship" said VCHR President Vo Van Ai.

Trade and investment agreements have the potential to exacerbate human rights violations in the context of labour rights, access to land and natural resources or when recourse mechanisms are designed to protect investors and not affected communities.

"These human rights violations can be prevented by conducting human rights impact assessments and by including safeguards in trade and investment agreements that address violations, or offer redress mechanisms", said FIDH President Karim Lahidji. We believe that the European Commission's refusal to carry out HRIAs is inconsistent with its legal obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights", he added.

Despite numerous **calls by FIDH and VCHR** and a **resolution of the European**

Parliament for the European Commission to include human rights impact assessments (HRIA) in the ongoing trade and investment negotiations with Vietnam, the EU Commissioner for Trade stated that the Commission did not “*envisage carrying out a specific human rights impact assessment for the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement*”. FIDH and VCHR believe that the European Commission’s refusal constitutes a case of maladministration. The two organizations urge the EU Ombudsman to address the situation and recommend that the European Commission review it.