

European Parliament condemns conviction of journalists and escalating crackdown on dissent in Vietnam



PARIS, 21 January 2021 (VCHR) – The **Vietnam Committee on Human Rights** (VCHR) welcomes the strong Resolution adopted by the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels today on the “[Human Rights situation in Vietnam, in particular the case of human rights journalists Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan](#)”. The resolution was tabled jointly by all seven of the political groups in the 705-member body from across the whole political spectrum (1).

“The Resolution is extremely relevant and timely” said VCHR President Võ Văn Ái. ***“It sends a strong message to the Vietnamese Communist Party on the eve of its 13th Congress in Hanoi, and reaches out***

**to
the new US President Joe Biden to work together with Europe and its
member
states to press for tangible human rights improvements in Vietnam”.**

The
Resolution, a long and detailed text, denounces a wide range of human rights
violations, notably the plight of political prisoners. Vietnam *“currently holds in
detention the largest
number of political prisoners in South-East Asia”*, it said, adding that the
EP is *“appalled by and condemns the
escalating crackdown on dissent and increasing violations of human rights in
Vietnam, including the sentencing, political intimidation, surveillance,
harassment, assaults, unfair trials and forced exiles of political activists,
journalists, bloggers, dissidents and human rights defenders for exercising
their freedom of expression, in clear violation of Vietnam’s international
human rights obligations”*.

The Resolution expressed particular concern for the arbitrary arrest and conviction of
Phạm Chí Dũng, Nguyễn Tường Thụy and **Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn**, founder and
members of the Independent Journalist Association of Vietnam. The three men, who
had reported on *“government mismanagement and corruption”*, human rights and
democracy, were charged with *“making, storing, spreading information, materials,
items for the purpose of opposing the State.”* Phạm Chí Dũng was sentenced to 15
years in prison, and his two colleagues to 11 years each, followed by three years
house arrest. Phạm Chí Dũng was also charged with *“cooperating foreign media to
deliver distorted information”* after he sent a [video message](#) to MEPs urging them to
postpone ratification of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) pending
human rights progress in Vietnam. The video message was sent to VCHR and shown at
a [Hearing at the EP on 3 December 2019](#).

<https://youtu.be/KnzZQe3QDw0>

Denouncing

harsh detention conditions, lack of access to legal counsel and denial of the right to a fair trial, the EP called on Vietnam to *“immediately and unconditionally release Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy and Le Huu Minh Tuan and all other journalists, human rights and environmental defenders, trade unionists and prisoners of conscience detained and sentenced for merely exercising their right to freedom of expression, and to drop all charges against them”*.

The

resolution said that almost all human rights defenders in Vietnam were detained under *“repressive provisions”* in the Criminal Code which are *“abusively used to silence, arrest, detain, sentence or restrict the activity of human rights defenders, dissidents, lawyers, trade unions, religious groups and non-governmental organisations, notably those that express critical views of the Government of Vietnam”*. It called on Vietnam to revise these provisions, notably Articles 117, 118 and 331 of the Code and all other restrictive legislation, such as the Cybersecurity Law or Decree 72 on the Internet. The Resolution stressed that reform of the Criminal Code is essential for the effective implementation of ILO Conventions 98 and 87 which Vietnam has promised to ratify. Without this reform, workers would risk imprisonment for criticising state policies in the workplace.

The text reflects

the deep dismay of Euro-MPs by the worsening situation of human rights in Vietnam despite the entry into force of the landmark EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). They reminded Vietnam of its binding commitments under the EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which is linked to EVFTA. PCA contains a *“human rights clause”* which allows for the EU to take *“appropriate measures”* – including sanctions and eventual suspension of the agreements – *“in case of severe and systematic violations of human rights”*.

During

today’s debate, MEP Maria Arena, Chair of the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights,

called for the immediate suspension of Free Trade Agreement with Vietnam. *“These severe and systematic violations exist and will continue to exist”, for “Vietnam will not change”, she said.*

Deploring

widespread censorship of the Internet and social media activities, the EP noted that *“at least two global social media platforms have substantially increased their compliance with Vietnam’s muzzle and censorship laws, including through the censorship of peaceful criticism of the State.”* This refers to the blocking of posts by Facebook and Google’s company Youtube since April 2020 in response to pressure from the Vietnamese authorities. This is a very serious problem in Vietnam which VCHR has repeatedly denounced. Vice-President [Penelope Faulkner](#) said that Facebook’s actions *“have dramatic consequences for Internet freedom, not only in Vietnam but worldwide. Vietnam is the first country in SE Asia – and possibly in the world, where Facebook has publicly acknowledged its compliance with government censorship”.*

<https://youtu.be/xxm4NtDla4g>

The EP Resolution

raised many key issues including freedom of religion or belief, mandatory registration and repression of religious activities deemed to be *“contrary to national interest, public order or national unity”*; called on Vietnam to recognise independent trade unions; to introduce an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty; to improve unsanitary detention conditions which increase the risk of infection with COVID-19; to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights defenders to visit Vietnam, and *“give them free and unfettered access to all parties they wish to consult”.*

It also called

for the establishment of independent monitoring and complaints mechanisms to provide remedy for victims of violations, and urged the European Commission and the EEAS to conduct a human rights impact assessment to examine the effects of EVFTA on human rights in Vietnam.

In conclusion, the Resolution called on *“EU Member States, notably ahead of the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam to strongly voice their concerns regarding the worsening human rights situation in Vietnam; encourages the EU and its Member States to intensify their international efforts to promote a joint initiative with likeminded partners, and particularly with the new US Administration, to work towards concrete human rights improvements in Vietnam at the UN Human Rights Council”*.

(1) Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) EPP - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) - Renew Group - Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance - (EFA) - Identity and Democracy Group - European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) - The Left Group in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL).