

***The Bangkok Post* : FIDH slams Thai-Vietnam collusion**

The Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has strongly criticized Thailand collusion with Vietnam in censoring discussions on Vietnam's human rights issues in the Thai soil.

"We are dismayed by the Thai authorities' decision to ban entry on the Thai territory of two well-known human rights defenders who have been peacefully advocating for human rights in Vietnam for years. This is frightening: it illustrates that it is impossible to speak about Vietnam's human rights record not only in Vietnam, but also in neighbouring countries", said Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH president in an e-mail sending to this reporter.

The press conference, earlier scheduled this morning at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand (FCCT), was intended at presenting to the Bangkok-based media a new report entitled "From "vision" to facts: human rights in Vietnam under its chairmanship of ASEAN". Vo Van Ai and Penelope Faulkner, respectively President and Vice-President of Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR), were scheduled to speak at this press event.

On the eve of his departure, Vo Van Ai received a call from the Thai embassy in Paris, and was told that in spite of the fact that he had obtained a visa for Thailand, he would not be allowed to enter Thai territory, following a request by the Vietnamese

government.

Penelope Faulkner was told yesterday by the air company at the Paris airport that she would not be allowed to board her flight because she would not be allowed to enter the Thai territory upon arrival in Bangkok.

"Our report is exclusively based on international human rights law and statistics from the Vietnamese official press. It includes concrete recommendations to the authorities of Vietnam in order to improve their human rights record, both in the country and as Chair of the Asean. It echoes voices inside Vietnam that are calling for the respect of human rights and the rule of law", added Mr Ai.

The pressure on the FCCT to cancel the FIDH-paid event and the refusal to allow advocacy activities on human rights in Vietnam to be held on the Thai territory witnessed the powerful nuisance capacity of Vietnam at regional level, and the total incapacity of the authorities of Vietnam to tolerate any debate on their human rights record, the FIDH statement said.

"The decision of the Thai authorities blatantly violates the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which notably provides that --Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms (Art 6.b);" said Ms Belhassen, the FIDH president.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, she said, article 12 also said "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms."

"Under this Declaration, the Thai authorities should in fact take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of human rights defenders against any threats, retaliation, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the above-mentioned rights," the FIDH president said.

Sophie Richardson, Human Rights Watch's acting director for Asia division, said Thailand intervention has betrayed its own reputation of the regional human rights hub.

"These representatives of an internationally respected human rights group chose Thailand precisely because of the country's reputation as a regional standard bearer for freedom of expression. But the actions of Thai officials have betrayed that reputation," said Ms Richardson.

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Thailand currently chairs the UN Human Rights Council, and should uphold the highest human rights standards. The Thai government owes the FCCT and the public an explanation why instead it took a page from Hanoi's playbook, said the acting director of the New York-based rights group.