

Pastor Nguyễn Trung Tôn kidnapped and beaten in Vietnam

PARIS, 2 March 2017 (VCHR) – The Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) is deeply concerned by the increasing use of physical violence perpetrated by police in plain clothes or gangs of thugs hired by the authorities to repress dissidents, human rights defenders and civil society activists in Vietnam. The recent kidnapping and beating of protestant pastor **Nguyễn Trung Tôn** and his colleague **Nguyễn Viết Tú** is the latest example of this disturbing trend.

“Vietnam ratified the UN Convention against Torture with great fanfare in 2015, but the base acts entrusted to police officers or hired thugs are blatantly acts of torture” said VCHR President Võ Văn Ái. ***“Vietnam must put an end to such practices and bring those responsible to justice”***.

On 27 February 2017, Pastor Nguyễn Trung Tôn, who is also president of the Brotherhood for Democracy (*Hội Anh Em Dân Chủ*) and Nguyễn Viết Tú travelled to Ba Đồn (Quảng Bình province) to meet other activists who had recently suffered police violence. When they arrived there at 9.30 pm, they were intercepted by a group of men who punched them in the face and forced them into a van.

In an interview with *Radio Free Asia*, Pastor Tôn said the men were security police in plain clothes. They covered the two activists’ heads and drove them to a remote forest area on Hương Khê mountain in the neighbouring province of Hà Tĩnh. They punched Pastor Tôn and Tú and beat them with an iron bar until 1.00 am, then robbed them of their clothes and possessions, tied them up and left them, injured and naked, on the mountain road. It was only thanks to the help of local residents, who found them around 2.00 am, that they were able to travel back to Pastor Tôn’s home in Thanh Hóa. He was seriously injured, and could not move one of his legs.

Pastor Nguyễn Trung Tôn is a pro-democracy activist, defender of religious freedom and human rights and former political prisoner. In 2011, he was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison and two years’ house arrest on charges of *“activities undermining the State”* and *“propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”* (Article 88 of the Criminal Code). For the past few weeks, he has been subjected to repeated harassments and intimidation by Security Police, including death threats

against him and his family.

This incident is indicative of an increasing climate of repressive violence against all forms of free expression in Vietnam. In 2015, hired thugs were massively used by Police to suppress nationwide demonstrations denouncing the ecological catastrophe caused by the Taiwanese company Formosa. Similarly, police in plain clothes and thugs conduct daily harassments and attacks against dissidents and members of non-recognized religious groups such as the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV).

On 14 February 2017, a procession of hundreds of Catholics from Nghệ An were brutally attacked by Police as they went to Hà Tĩnh courthouse to file complaints and demand compensation for their losses in the Formosa disaster. On 17 February 2017, demonstrations held in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to commemorate the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War were also violently repressed, and at least ten people detained. Just recently, civil society activists and human rights defenders were harassed and intimidated to prevent them meeting with a delegation from the European Parliament visiting Vietnam from 20 - 24 February 2017 to assess the situation of human rights in the country.