

[RFA] Vietnamese Blogger Phan Kim Khanh Given Six-Year Prison Term

Radio Free Asia - 2017-10-25

Vietnamese democracy advocate and blogger Phan Kim Khanh was sentenced on Wednesday to six years in prison by a court in northeastern Vietnam's Thai Nguyen province on charges of spreading "*propaganda against the state*" in a trial rights groups described as "*unfair.*"

Khanh, 24 and a senior student of the Faculty of International Studies of Thai Nguyen University at the time of his March 21 arrest, had posted anti-corruption writings aimed at Communist Party and government leaders on his two blogs.

Khanh will also serve four years of house arrest after completing his prison term, according to the court's sentence.

Speaking to RFA's Vietnamese Service following Khanh's trial, defense attorney Ha Huy Son called the evidence against Khanh "*very vague.*"

"It's unfortunate that he was accused of [carrying out] 'propaganda against the state,'" Son said. *"I presented many things to the court that should have been seriously considered, but in the end they still gave him that sentence."*

Khanh's father Phan Kim Dung was permitted to attend the trial, but several activists who went to show their support were not allowed in, sources told RFA.

Former prisoner of conscience Bui Thi Minh Hang, who was barred from the building, said that following recent moves by authorities to crack down on dissidents, "*activists have all prepared themselves for these kinds of heavy sentences to be handed down by the government.*"

"No one is happy about this sentence given to Khanh," she added.

'Law of the jungle'

In a video clip posted on Facebook following the trial, Khanh's mother Do Thi Lap voiced support for her son's activities online, calling him a patriot.

"Vietnam's current law is vague. It's more like the law of the jungle," she said.

"If I could see Khanh now, I would tell him that his father and I have always supported what he's done. I believe that he acted as he did because he is a patriot."

In an Oct. 25 statement, the Paris-based Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) said Khanh's only crime had been *"to peacefully express his legitimate views."*

"His unfair trial and groundless conviction show just one thing: that Vietnam is afraid of criticism; it feels threatened when its citizens communicate, get together and share concerns about their country's future," VCHR President Vo Van Ai said.

Article 88 of Vietnam's Criminal Code, under which Khanh was charged and sentenced, is *"routinely invoked to detain government critics and human rights defenders, [and] has been strongly denounced by the United Nations as inconsistent with international human rights law,"* VCHR said.

In a statement released on Oct. 24, Human Rights Watch (HRW) Asia director Brad Adams said *"Vietnam ought to get rid of these laws and stop persecuting students and ordinary people for just talking about the country's problems on the Internet."*

"The only crime Phan Kim Khanh committed was to express political views disapproved by the authorities," Adams said. *"Students should be encouraged to write about social and political problems—not punished."*

Campaign of repression

Khanh's arrest and trial come amid an ongoing campaign of repression targeting dissident bloggers and activists, with at least 28 people arrested and charged under vaguely worded national security laws, HRW said.

Speaking to RFA, several dissident bloggers criticized a statement this week by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc that Vietnam should be strict in handling cases of online discussions that *"abuse democracy and provoke social instability."*

"What he said is not consistent with social development," Vo Van Don, an attorney based in Vietnam's coastal Phu Yen province, said. *"It is the right of every human being to speak out about what they think. This doesn't 'abuse democracy.'"*

Quê Me

Quê Me: Action for democracy in Vietnam & Vietnam Committee on Human Rights
<http://queme.org/en>

"I'm just telling the truth. I'm not against anyone," added blogger Phan Tat Thanh, who has drawn pressure from the police for his posts on his Facebook page.

"I've told the security forces that they can protect the country in their own way, while I protect it in mine," he said.

"They always want to put makeup on it to 'make it look beautiful,' but I want to put medicine on it. Medicine may be bitter, but it helps to cure diseases."

Reported by RFA's Vietnamese Service. Translated by Emily Peyman. Written in English by Richard Finney.