

Vietnam: EU must demand end to repression of civil society, respect of human rights pledges

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2022 (FIDH & VCHR): The European Union (EU) must use the upcoming human rights dialogue to demand the Vietnamese government end repression of civil society and fulfill its pledges stemming from the EU-Vietnam

Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), FIDH and its member organization Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR)

urged today. The two organizations made the call ahead of the upcoming EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue, which will be held on 6 April 2022 in Brussels.

“The Vietnamese government’s pledges to uphold democratic freedoms and human rights as an essential element of the free trade

agreement with the EU are contradicted by its ongoing repression of civil society. The EU should no longer tolerate Hanoi’s empty promises and use the

human rights dialogue and other tools to seek tangible improvements in the

human rights situation,” said FIDH Secretary-General Adilur Rahman Khan.

[In a new briefing paper released today](#), FIDH and VCHR detail the government’s relentless crackdown on civil society. Since the last EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue, which was held in February 2020, an alarming escalation of arrests, unfair trials, harsh prison sentences, and physical violence against human rights defenders, bloggers, environmental rights leaders, and members of civil society has continued unabated.

Between 1 January and 31 December 2021, at least 30 people - including three women, activists, government critics, and human rights defenders - were arrested. During the same period, 32 (including seven women) were sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years.

Nearly all of those who were arbitrarily detained or imprisoned in 2021 were charged under “national security” provisions of the Criminal Code, such as Article 117 (“making, storing or disseminating information, documents, materials and items against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”) and Article 331 (“abusing democratic freedoms to harm the interests of the state”). Prison sentences imposed were particularly long, with women often receiving some of the harshest jail terms.

FIDH and VCHR are particularly concerned over the arrests and convictions of several prominent environmental rights defenders based on their involvement in promoting awareness of EVFTA and the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advancing sustainable development in Vietnam. Since June 2021, at least four leading environmentalists have been arrested on charges of alleged “tax evasion” (Article 200 of the Criminal Code). These arrests indicate an emerging and disturbing pattern in the use of Vietnam’s tax laws to criminalize environmental leaders, and follows the broader targeting of civil society

leaders, as well as shrinking civil society space.

“Civil society input is a crucial component for the implementation of the EVFTA and the Vietnamese government’s targeting of environmental rights defenders flies in the face of Hanoi’s commitments under the agreement. The EU must demand that the Vietnamese government give civil society an unfettered right to monitor and document the implementation of the EVFTA without being subjected to reprisals,” said VCHR President Vo Van Ai.

FIDH

and VCHR urge the EU to seriously reconsider the merits of the human rights dialogue, which is portrayed by the Vietnamese government as a demonstration that it fully complies with the country’s human rights obligations. In its current form, the process, which is held behind closed doors and lacks benchmarks, monitoring mechanisms, and follow-up procedures, does not contribute to strengthening human rights in Vietnam.

[See FIDH-VCHR Briefing paper for the 10th EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue](#)
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