

## **Vietnam: EU must use upcoming rights dialogue to demand an end to crackdown on dissent**

PARIS, 29 November 2017 (FIDH & VCHR) - The European Union (EU) must urge the Vietnamese government to end the ongoing repression of peaceful dissent, repeal its repressive laws, and immediately release all political prisoners, FIDH and its member organization Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) said today ahead of the EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue. The bilateral talks are scheduled to be held on 1 December 2017 in Hanoi.

In a new [briefing paper](#) released today, FIDH and VCHR detail human rights concerns in four key areas: 1) Violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; 2) Restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly; 3) Restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief; and 4) The ongoing use of the death penalty.

***“The arbitrary detention and imprisonment of activists in the days preceding the dialogue with the EU shows that Hanoi is accustomed to the international community’s all-talk-no-action approach to the human rights situation in the country,”*** said FIDH President Dimitris Christopoulos.

On 27 November 2017, at the conclusion of a trial that lasted only half a day, a court in Ha Tinh Province sentenced 22-year-old blogger Nguyen Van Hoa to seven years in prison on charges of *“conducting propaganda against the state”* under Article 88 of the Criminal Code. Nguyen Van Hoa was accused of producing online videos and interviews related to the Formosa environmental disaster. Just one day before, on 26 November, lawyer Vo An Don, who was to defend imprisoned blogger Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh aka Mother Mushroom at her appeal trial on 30 November, suddenly had his license revoked by the Bar Association in Phu Yên Province and now cannot defend her at the trial.

FIDH and VCHR express grave concern over the alarming escalation of arrests, unfair trials, harsh prison sentences, and physical violence against human rights defenders, bloggers, and civil society in 2017. Vietnam currently holds at least 130 political prisoners. One salient example is that of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Do, who is still under house arrest without charge after spending more than three decades in detention for his peaceful advocacy for religious freedom, human rights, and democracy.

The systematic repression of fundamental civil and political rights is incompatible with

Vietnam's binding international obligations as a state party to core United Nations (UN) human rights treaties, and with its pledge to the EU to uphold democratic freedoms and human rights.

***“In its current form, the human rights dialogue is window dressing on the country's dire human rights record and enables the Vietnamese government to boast in international circles that it fully complies with the country's human rights obligations. The EU must transform the dialogue into a more effective process that includes benchmarks, monitoring mechanisms, and follow-up procedures,”*** said VCHR President Vo Van Ai.

The recent detention of activists who met with EU officials as part of their consultations with civil society ahead of the EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue demonstrates the Vietnamese government's disdain for its commitments to the EU and its contempt for the dialogue process. On 16 November 2017, police in Hanoi detained blogger Pham Doan Trang, activist Nguyen Quang A, and former political prisoner Bui Thi Minh Hang for several hours after the three briefed EU representatives on the human rights situation in Vietnam.

The intimidation of activists in conjunction with the EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue is not uncommon. In December 2015, police in Hanoi arrested human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai as he was preparing to meet EU delegates who were in the Vietnamese capital for the fifth EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue, held on 15 December 2015.

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