

Vietnam: Human rights dialogue held amid heightened crackdown

PARIS, 4 March 2019 (FIDH & VCHR) - The European Union (EU) must urge the Vietnamese government to end its ongoing crackdown on 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. The two organizations made the call on the occasion of the eighth EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue, which is set to be held today in Brussels.

[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) Repression of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly; 3) Restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief; and 4) The increased use of the death penalty.

“The Vietnamese government's ongoing attack on civil and political rights undermines its capacity to be a sustainable economic partner of the EU. It is in the EU's interests to press Hanoi to end the crackdown on civil society and enact urgent legal and institutional reforms,” said FIDH Secretary-General Debbie Stothard.

In 2018, brutal physical attacks and other acts of harassment and intimidation against human rights defenders, activists, bloggers, and members of religious groups continued across the country.

At least 150 political prisoners remain behind bars across Vietnam. Since the previous EU-Vietnam human rights dialogue in December 2017, the ongoing crackdown on government critics, bloggers,

activists, and human rights defenders has intensified. Between December 2017 and February 2019, at least 40 individuals, including eight women, were arbitrarily arrested for the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression or freedom of peaceful assembly. In addition, 60 individuals, including 14 women, were sentenced to prison terms - with eight receiving particularly harsh sentences, ranging from 13 to 20 years.

Nearly all of the government critics, bloggers, activists, and human rights defenders who were arbitrarily detained or imprisoned were charged under frequently-used repressive provisions of Vietnam's Criminal Code that are inconsistent with international standards related to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Vietnam is a state party.

Other recently passed laws have restricted freedoms. The Cybersecurity Law, which was adopted in June 2018 and came into force in January 2019, dealt a severe blow to internet freedom. The Law on Belief and Religion, which came into force in January 2018, marks a hardening of Vietnam's policies on freedom of religion or belief. Immediately after the law came into force, and throughout 2018 and in 2019, every major religious community, including Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) Buddhists, Catholics, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhists, Protestants, Muslims, and Falun Gong practitioners, reported being targeted by the authorities.

“The adoption and use of new repressive laws and the unprecedented concentration of power assumed by the leader of the Communist

Party of Vietnam signal that the crackdown on peaceful dissent may intensify.

It's time for the EU to demand

the Vietnamese government stop its assault in civil society, release all political prisoners, and enact reforms,” said

VCHR President Vo Van Ai.

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly also remained severely restricted. Repressive anti-demonstration regulations were widely invoked in 2018 to quell massive protests against a controversial draft law on Special Economic Zones and the draft Cybersecurity Law. In June 2018, hundreds of protesters were arrested nationwide and at least 118 protesters were subsequently sentenced to prison terms in connection with the demonstrations on charges of disrupting public order.

With regard to the death penalty, the number of death sentences increased dramatically in 2018, with 122 more cases compared to the previous year. The government also reported that at least 85 executions had been carried out in 2018.

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