



Joint statement

23 March 2018

Nguyen Phu Trong, who as Vietnamese Communist Party general secretary is more responsible than anyone else for Vietnam's shocking human rights record during the past 15 months, will visit France from 25 to 27 March at President Emmanuel Macron's invitation.

In 2017, Hanoi launched the biggest crackdown on freedom of expression in 20 years. At least 25 bloggers, human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists have been arrested or deported.

Pham Minh Hoang, an academic, blogger and former prisoner of conscience with French and Vietnamese dual citizenship, was stripped of his Vietnamese nationality and sent into exile in June, and was forced to leave his wife and daughter behind.

Long prison sentences are now being passed on those who want to inform the public. The blogger Tran Thi Nga was sentenced to nine years in prison because of her human rights activism. The citizen-journalist known as Me Nam ("Mother Mushroom") is serving a ten-year jail term because she reported that fishermen were seeking compensation for the Formosa environmental disaster. Last month, the blogger Hoang Duc Binh was sentenced to 14 years in prison for posting a video of a protest by these fishermen. Six bloggers and activists, including the human rights lawyer and blogger Nguyen Van Dai, who has been held for more than two years, will go on trial on 5 April.

Others, including Nguyen Van Oai and Le Dinh Luong, are also awaiting trial. The detainees are often transferred to prisons located more than a thousand kilometres from their families. Torture and mistreatment are routinely used in prisons to extract confessions and force detainees to plead guilty. It is not unusual for prison officials to deny detainees appropriate medical treatment.

By these acts, Vietnam is contravening articles 5, 9, 18, 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is systematically violating the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to which it is party, and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, which it has signed.

This year is the fifth anniversary of the strategic partnership between France and Vietnam. A partnership of this kind, the aim of which is "reinforcement of the relationship in all domains," should be reflected in an improvement in the human rights situation. But this is far from being the case.

With its European partners, France therefore has a moral duty to demand that the Vietnamese authorities honour their international obligations and ensure respect for the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year. It is essential that, in their meetings with General Secretary Trong, France's representatives should raise human rights issues with complete frankness.

On the eve of this official visit, Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Viet Tan urge the French authorities not to remain silent on the human rights situation in Vietnam and to use all possible influence to get Vietnam to:

- Carry out the immediate and unconditional release of citizen-journalists and prisoners of conscience, both those already been convicted and those awaiting trial.

- Ensure that conditions for detainees satisfy the "Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment," adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988.

- Stop using national security laws and vaguely-worded criminal code provisions to crush peaceful dissent and criminalize freedom of expression.

- Stop intimidating and using violence against human rights defenders, such as the brutal attack on the Protestant pastor Nguyen Trung Ton on 27 February 2017.

- Fully respect the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which has been binding on Vietnam since 1982, and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, which it ratified in 2015.

Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Viet Tan