



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 2010

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S HUMAN RIGHTS

A-Z COUNTRY ENTRIES

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protesting against the new education law which came into effect in August. In October, the 11 civil servants were released pending trial. Despite a reported lack of credible evidence against him, Richard Blanco remained in prison at the end of the year awaiting trial on charges of inciting violence resulting in injury to a police officer.

Violence against women and girls

Progress in the investigation and prosecution of cases of domestic violence remained slow. More courts and prosecutors' offices specializing in dealing with gender-based violence were established. However, the numbers remained insufficient to deal with the high volume of cases. The Public Prosecutor's Office in Caracas stated that it had received more than 12,000 complaints between January and August and that only half of those received could be dealt with.

VIET NAM	
SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM	
Head of state:	Nguyen Minh Triet
Head of government:	Nguyen Tan Dung
Death penalty:	retentionist
Population:	88.1 million
Life expectancy:	74.3 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f):	27/20 per 1,000
Adult literacy:	90.3 per cent

Severe restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly continued. Repression of dissidents intensified with new arrests of political and human rights activists, most of whom had criticized widespread corruption and government policies relating to China. Bloggers were briefly detained. In most cases, national security concerns were cited as a pretext for arrests and criminal investigations. Peaceful protests by Catholics over land ownership were met with excessive force and arrests by police. Members of ethnic and religious minority groups were threatened and harassed. The National Assembly approved the removal of the death penalty for eight crimes, but 21 capital offences remained. At least 59 death sentences were handed down, and

nine executions were reported in the media. No official statistics on the death penalty were made public.

Background

Corruption remained a key public issue. On 30 June, Viet Nam ratified the UN Convention against Corruption. The government rejected key recommendations arising from its Universal Periodic Review. It refused to: amend or repeal national security provisions of the 1999 Penal Code inconsistent with international law; remove other restrictions on dissent, debate, political opposition and the rights to freedom of expression and assembly; and release prisoners of conscience. An increasing demand for land led to the adoption of legislation in October on the provision of compensation, resettlement and work opportunities to residents displaced by development projects.

Freedom of expression – dissidents

Tight controls on freedom of expression continued, including in the print and broadcast media and on the internet. A new wave of arrests began in May, targeting independent lawyers, bloggers and pro-democracy activists critical of government policies. The authorities claimed to have uncovered a plot "infringing upon national security" involving 27 people. One of those arrested was sentenced to five and a half years' imprisonment in December, and at least four others were in pre-trial detention at year's end. They were charged under Article 79 of the national security section of the Penal Code for attempting to overthrow the state, which carries the death penalty. They are affiliated to the Democratic Party of Viet Nam, an exile political group calling for multi-party democracy. All had publicly criticized controversial business deals and border policies relating to China.

■ Le Cong Dinh, a prominent lawyer, was arrested on 13 June. The government immediately launched a propaganda campaign in the state-controlled media against him. In August, state television interrupted regular broadcasts to air video clips with his "confessions". He was held incommunicado, with no visits from family members or lawyers allowed. The Ministry of Justice revoked his licence, forbidding him to practise law.

Political prisoners/prisoners of conscience

At least 31 political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience Father Nguyen Van Ly, Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan, remained in prison after being sentenced in unfair trials. Others included lawyers, trade unionists and members of independent political and human rights groups. Most of them were convicted of “conducting propaganda” against the state under Article 88 of the Penal Code.

In October, nine dissidents arrested in September 2008 for unfurling banners, distributing leaflets, posting on the internet information criticizing government policies and calling for democracy, were tried. They were all charged under Article 88. The first trial took place at Ha Noi People’s court, where poets Tran Duc Thach and Pham Van Troi were sentenced to three and four years’ imprisonment respectively. ■ Vu Hung, a physics teacher, received a three-year sentence at the trial. He went on hunger strike in late 2008 after security officers repeatedly beat him during interrogation. He went on hunger strike again following his trial in protest at his sentence and conditions of detention. Police officials had arrested him earlier during a peaceful demonstration in April 2008, when he was beaten before being released.

In the second trial, six men, including writers Nguyen Xuan Ngia, aged 60, and Nguyen Van Tinh, aged 67, were sentenced to between three and six years’ imprisonment.

All nine defendants also received up to four years’ probation or house arrest on release.

Discrimination – ethnic and religious groups

Security officials continued to arrest, harass and closely monitor members of religious groups perceived to be opponents of the government. The Supreme Patriarch of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam (UBCV), Thich Quang Do, remained under de facto house arrest, and other leaders faced restrictions on movement and close surveillance.

Security forces confronted Catholics and members of the minority Khmer Krom in disputes over land ownership, using unnecessary force against and arresting peaceful protesters.

In September and December, the authorities orchestrated mobs, including plain-clothes police, to

intimidate, harass and physically attack almost 380 followers of Buddhist monk Thich Nhan Hanh to force them to leave their monastery in Lam Dong province.

At least six minority Montagnards in the Central Highlands were sentenced in April and September to between eight and 12 years’ imprisonment on charges of “undermining national solidarity”. An unknown number remained imprisoned since large-scale protests about land confiscation and freedom of religious practice in 2001 and 2004.

Death penalty

After discussions in the National Assembly, members voted to remove the death penalty for eight crimes, including four economic offences, reducing the number of capital offences to 21; the Ministry of Justice had proposed a reduction of 12 crimes. The death penalty for drug trafficking, for which most death sentences are handed down, was retained. The government maintained its policy of secrecy on all aspects of the death penalty, including statistics. According to media reports 59 people were sentenced to death during the year, and nine executions were reported by the media.

Amnesty International reports

- Viet Nam should release peaceful critics (ASA 41/005/2009)
- Viet Nam: Prisoner of conscience sentenced (ASA 41/008/2009)
- Viet Nam: Prisoner of conscience, Le Cong Dinh (ASA 41/002/2009)