



VIET NAM 2024

Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Human rights defenders, journalists and people detained for political reasons faced torture and inhumane prison conditions.

The government used counterterrorism laws against activists and Montagnards from the Dak Lak region, resulting in arbitrary arrests and detentions. New laws were introduced to police social media and further silence dissent. High levels of pollution persisted. Death sentences continued to be imposed and there was heightened concern over an intensifying crackdown on civil society space.

BACKGROUND

Four different presidents during the year reflected the internal tumult within the Communist Party. A concurrent anticorruption drive targeted high-profile political as well as business figures. Viet Nam's human rights record was examined by the UN. A deadly attack on two police posts in Dak Lak region in June 2023 elicited a furious response from the government in March. The Montagnard Indigenous Peoples continued to face decades-long systemic repression and discrimination, rooted in a complex history of marginalization and lack of protection of their traditional land rights and freedom of religion.

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TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Imprisoned human rights defenders, journalists and activists continued to be subjected to torture and other ill-treatment including denial of adequate healthcare.

In October, human rights defenders Trịnh Bá Tư and Bùi Văn Thuận, both serving eight- year prison sentences for “anti-state propaganda”, began a hunger strike at Nghe An prison No 6. Tư, a land rights defender, had previously reported on prison conditions during his detention. His mother and brother were held in different prisons, facing similar conditions. Thuận, a former teacher and a member of the Muong ethnic group in Hoa Binh province, protested about human rights violations and environmental issues.

After 21 days, Tư and Thuận ended their hunger strike when authorities agreed to improve conditions, including opening the “tiger cage” used to hold imprisoned activists in solitary confinement in Nghe An province.

A “tiger cage” is a torture device made of iron bars, providing a space of only 1m (3.3 feet) wide in which to move around. Prisoners were reportedly locked in these cages for months at a time.

Journalists

In November the family of journalist Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn described his health as rapidly declining, fearing an untreated cancer. Tuấn is a member of the Vietnam Independent Journalists' Association (IJAVN), serving an 11-year prison sentence for making, storing and disseminating information “for the purpose of opposing the state of Socialist Republic of Vietnam”, under Article 117 of the Criminal Code. Two others imprisoned from the IJAVN, Phạm Chí Dũng (15-year sentence) and Nguyễn Tường Thụy (11-year sentence), also reported their health degradation.

In October, blogger and YouTuber Đường Văn Thái was given a 12-year sentence by the Hanoi People's Court after he was accused of making and spreading information aimed at opposing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Granted refugee status in Thailand in 2019, Đường Văn Thái went missing in Bangkok on 13 April 2023. The circumstances of his disappearance suggested Vietnamese state agents may have been involved in capturing him and taking him back to Viet Nam, according to witness testimony and audio recordings on file with Amnesty International.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In September, Viet Nam refused to adopt numerous recommendations linked to freedom of expression issued by the UN's UPR procedure. According to Amnesty International's records, at least 45 journalists, human rights defenders and citizens have been arrested, often on spurious charges, since April 2023. The

situation for civil society worsened amid a more general political tightening. Civicus, an NGO monitoring global civic space, rated Viet Nam as “closed”, the lowest possible ranking.

Digital surveillance

On 9 November the government issued a decree which targeted social media operators - including Meta's Facebook and Alphabet's Google - requiring Vietnamese users to authenticate accounts by providing a mobile phone or personal identification number, it requires operators to provide details on Vietnamese users to the Ministry of Information and Communications and the Ministry of Public Security, and remove content at either Ministry's request.

This decree continued the strict policing of online freedom of expression by the Ministry of Public Security.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

In January, more than 100 Montagnard people were convicted on terrorism-related charges connected to the 2023 attack on police posts. The UN condemned the use of counterterrorism laws against the Montagnards.

In August, UN Special Rapporteurs accused the government of “inciting civilian vigilantes from a majority ethnic group to hunt down suspects believed to be Montagnard Indigenous Peoples” following the 2023 attack. Bum Byă, one of those arrested, died in custody on 8 March after being tortured. Two Montagnards told Amnesty International they were tortured by authorities to force confessions after being arbitrarily arrested following the attack.

RIGHT TO HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In June, UN representatives from WHO, UNDP and UNICEF called for stronger action to counter Viet Nam's pollution problem. This followed IQAir's annual survey, released in March, which named Viet Nam the second most polluted country in the ASEAN region, with the 22nd worst air quality globally. According to Ember, a global energy think tank, Viet Nam generated 42% of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources, higher than the global average of 39%. However, coal use, imports and coal-fired emissions all climbed to record levels.

Detained environmental activist Đặng Đình Bách, a leader of the climate change movement in Viet Nam that had sought a just transition from fossil fuels, began a third hunger strike early in the year. He was protesting against his

detention conditions, which were described by the UN in February as “deplorable”. Initially arrested on 24 June 2021, he was sentenced to five years in prison for “tax evasion” and held in a prison wing reserved for imprisoned activists in Nghe An Province. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention had deemed his detention to be arbitrary.

DEATH PENALTY

The government made no observable progress to end its use of the death penalty, including for economic crimes and drug- related offences. Its use remained shrouded in secrecy.

Trương Mỹ Lan, a well-known business figure and the chairwoman of property giant Vạn Thịnh Phát, was found guilty in April of fraud and embezzling billions of dollars from

Saigon Commercial Bank. Lan was sentenced to death, although she may avoid this outcome if she can return some of the embezzled assets. Her case was perceived as the highest profile in the “Blazing Furnaces” anti-corruption campaign.