

Vietnam: The Government must end the harassment and intimidation of Huynh Thuc Vy

(Bangkok, 27 August 2020) – FORUM-ASIA and the 18 undersigned civil society organisations condemn the ongoing intimidation against human rights defender and prominent blogger Huynh Thuc Vy and urge the government, as the Chair of ASEAN, to end the practice of using judicial harassment to intimidate human rights defenders.

Huynh Thuc Vy, a prominent Vietnamese blogger and co-founder of the Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR), has been under house arrest since November 2018. She was charged and later sentenced to two years and nine months' imprisonment for violating Article 276 of the 1999 Penal Code which criminalises the desecration of the Vietnamese flag.

The charge stems from her activism against human rights violations in the country by splashing Vietnamese flags with white paint in 2017. The court allowed her to be put under house arrest until her child reaches the age of three, when she would then have to serve the full term.¹

Although under house arrest, she is still subject to continuous harassment from state forces. The most recent case took place on 19 July 2020, when security officials snatched Huynh Thuc Vy's scarf while she was on her way home from church with her daughter. Two weeks before this incident, she and her colleagues from VNWHR were openly condemned and denounced as a 'reactionary force' during a national TV broadcast. Similarly, VNWHR co-founder Tran Thi Nga and other members of the organisation have faced ongoing intimidation and threats.

'We strongly deplore these tactics of harassment by state forces which violate the fundamental rights of an individual. These must end immediately, as they stoke a culture of fear amongst the general public,' said the civil society groups.

When taking the Chairmanship of ASEAN in January this year, Vietnam has committed to lead ASEAN towards a 'cohesive and responsive' region by prioritising peace, prosperity, and enhancing partnerships for sustainable development.²

'Vietnam cannot meet its commitment when its reputation on human rights remains poor. As the Chair of ASEAN, it should provide an example on the protection of human rights, through allowing the critical discussions that human rights defenders like Huynh Thuc Vy have tried to initiate,' said the groups.

The harassment of Huynh Thuc Vy and her colleagues is only part of a systematic crackdown against human rights defenders. In March 2020, Radio Free Asia blogger Truong Duy Nhat was sentenced to ten years in prison over politically motivated charges.³

¹ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/flag-11302018141521.html>

² https://asean2020.vn/web/asean_en/thong-diep-cua-thu-tuong

³ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/appeal-08102020161126.html>

In July 2020, eight democracy activists were recently convicted and sentenced for a minimum of two years and six months to six years for planning protests, and allegedly compromising national security.⁴

'We call on the Vietnamese authorities to end the judicial harassment and intimidation of Huynh Thuc Vy and other human rights defenders. The State is responsible to protect fundamental freedoms as enshrined in its international obligations, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Vietnam should aim towards enabling a safe space where people can express criticism and different opinions without facing reprisals,' said the groups.

Signatories

1. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
2. ALTSEAN Burma
3. Association for Law, Human Rights and Justice (HAK Association), Timor-Leste
4. Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for Development in Mindanaw (Balaod Mindanaw), the Philippines
5. Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), Indonesia
6. Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Indonesia
7. Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Indonesia
8. Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM), Indonesia
9. Judicial System Monitoring Programme (JSMP), Timor-Leste
10. Karapatan Alliance Philippines (KARAPATAN), the Philippines
11. Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS), South Korea
12. MARUAH, Singapore
13. Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)
14. People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
15. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), the Philippines
16. Pusat KOMAS, Malaysia
17. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Malaysia
18. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Indonesia
19. Think Centre, Singapore

⁴ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/prison-07312020155555.html>

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The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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