

Vietnam: Donor governments must invest in human rights protections to ensure the country's 'just' transition

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) calls on donor governments to place national and international human rights as well as environmental rights principles at the centre of their investments in Vietnam.

On 7 March 2024, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a [Comprehensive Strategic Partnership](#) with Vietnam on the heels of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Canberra from 4 to 6 March 2024. This partnership promises close cooperation and increased investment on a range of issues, most notably around green energy and transition minerals.

Vietnam—touted for its 'bamboo diplomacy'¹—has [signed similar agreements](#) with China, the US, South Korea, India, and Russia over the past few years.

Donor governments' inaction

The increasing focus on critical minerals as an economic saviour—also reflected through the [USD 15.5 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership \(JETP\)](#)—indicates a worrisome trend of using green energy as a [greenwashing tool](#) while further weakening the country's already [poor track record](#) for respecting human rights and environmental rights.

JETP, which aims to support Vietnam's net zero goal by 2050, has been the [subject of repeated criticism](#) since its inception.

The [International Partners Group](#)²—made up of JETP's donor governments—has been [heavily criticised](#) by rights groups for ignoring human rights and environmental rights frameworks.

Most recently, Canadian Ambassador for Climate Change Catherine Stewart—during her [visit](#) to Hà Nội on 14 March 2024—claimed that the two countries' JETP partnership will 'be a model to continue fostering cooperation in environment and climate change,' completely failing to acknowledge the need for robust human rights benchmarks as a prerequisite to a truly just transition.

The donor governments' inaction to hold Vietnam accountable for its human rights performance is being misused by the Vietnamese Government to continue business as usual.

¹ A term coined to describe Vietnam's foreign policy strategy of 'more friends, fewer foes', using the analogy of a bamboo tree which has sturdy roots and flexible branches.

² Comprising the EU, the UK, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway and the US.

It must be noted that Vietnam adopted the [National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights](#) in 2023, which states its commitment towards [responsible investment](#) for the welfare of its people and the planet.

Vietnam is currently a member of the UN Human Rights Council, where it is failing to fulfil its political commitments and legal obligations to respect fundamental rights and freedoms.

Since 2021, FORUM-ASIA has [documented](#) over 160 cases of violations against human rights defenders in Vietnam. A [quarter](#) of such cases involved the harassment, abuse, violence, arbitrary arrest, and detention of [environmental human rights defenders and land rights defenders](#) such as [Hoàng Thi Minh Hồng](#) and [Dang Dinh Bách](#). The trend reaffirms the shrinking of civic space and human rights in the country, which donor governments have failed to scrutinise.

With donor governments blatantly ignoring the country's dismal human rights record, its existing regulatory frameworks dissuade an inclusive and vibrant civil society. This creates the perfect breeding ground for violations to intensify, moving further away from the 'just' promise of just transitions.

Call to Action

FORUM-ASIA strongly urges donor governments to hold the Vietnamese Government accountable to its international human rights obligations as mentioned under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) and the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), to which Vietnam is a State Party

'FORUM-ASIA calls on donor governments to adopt and implement a comprehensive human rights-based framework for all investments in Vietnam, with strict oversight and redressal mechanisms,' said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

We emphasise the need for donor governments to adopt a zero tolerance policy towards restrictions on fundamental freedoms and civic space. They should pressure the Vietnamese Government to stop targeting human rights defenders and to drop all charges against those unjustly [detained](#).

Lastly, we encourage all renewable energy-focused partnerships to be community-centric and inclusive to ensure a 'just' transition that is genuinely equitable and representative of the needs of all sections of society.

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. 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 consultative status with the United

Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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