

Mrs. Ho Thi Bich Khuong, prisoner of conscience

Sentenced to five years for demanding justice. Brutally assaulted in prison



Mrs. Ho Thi Bich Khuong, born in 1967 in Nghe An Province, lives in Nam Anh Village, Nam Dan District, Nghe An. On 11/15/2011, public security agents detained her for “collecting documents related to grievances and litigation with the intent to produce material critical of the Communist Party of Vietnam”. On 12/29/2011, the People's Procuracy of Nghe An prosecuted her at the conclusion of a lower court's evaluation phase. Mrs. Khuong was given a five-year prison term, to be followed with three years of probation and surveillance for “propaganda against the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”, as defined in Item C, Section 1, Article No. 88 of the penal code. Mrs. Khuong was also accused of giving interviews that were not favorable to the government to foreign radio stations; posting interview transcripts on the Internet, and collaborating with human rights groups associated with individuals that the government had labeled "reactionary". On 12/3/2012, during her incarceration in Prison K4 in Camp No. 5, a facility holding female detainees in Yen Dinh District, Thanh Hoa Province, Mrs. Khuong wrote to her sister Ho Thi Lan a letter relating how "several individuals had assaulted her in a gang-style beatdown".

In retaliation of her fearless denunciation of corruption and injustice, the government had harassed her, wrecked her store and home, and seized her land. Subsequently she joined the labor export program and was sent to South Korea. It turned out that she became a victim of labor trafficking. In South Korea, she took the initiative to defend her fellow human trafficking victims against their employer's violation of worker rights and contractual agreements. When she demanded the South Korean employer and the representative of the Vietnamese labor exports company to abide by the employment contract, they ordered their thugs to beat up Khuong. Subsequently they repatriated her.

From 1996 on, she began her campaign of asking the local and central governments to return her property. Beginning in 1999, she became a vocal advocate for victims of illegal property confiscation. Public security agents and other government officials began to hound her from then on. Her husband was mysteriously murdered on his last trip to Hanoi for the purpose of demanding restitution of their confiscated property.

She advocated on behalf of victims from the Central Provinces (primarily Nghe An and Thanh Hoa) whose properties had been confiscated by the government. On 05/11//2005, Mrs. Khuong was detained and later sentenced by the Ba Dinh District People's Court (in Hanoi) to a six-month term for "disrupting public order". After her release on 11/11/2005, she continued helping victims of property confiscation. In addition, she disseminated details about the government's harassment of her family and publicized the plight of the rural poor. human rights advocates, and others whose rights had been trampled by the government. On 04/ 26/2007, public security

agents arrested her in an internet store in Nghe An for accessing foreign websites. In April 2008, after holding her for almost a year without due process, the Nam Dan District People's Court in Nghe An tried her for "Abuse of the democratic rights granted to a citizen in working against the state's interests and the interests of social/citizens' organizations". After serving her prison term, she was released on 4/26/2009.

On 9/14/2011, Human Rights Watch announced that Mrs. Khuong was to receive the prestigious Hellman-Hammett Award recognizing writers who had demonstrated courage and conviction in the face of political persecution. On 05/29/2012 Human Rights Watch appealed to the government of Vietnam to "void the conviction of blogger Ho Thi Bich Khuong, 44, and immediately free her. The People's Court of Nghe An is scheduled on May 30, 2012, to hear her appeal against her five-year sentence for violating article 88 of the penal code, which forbids "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam". Mr. Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, said: "For the third time in seven years, Ho Thi Bich Khuong is in prison for exercising the right to voice her views. The systematic application of Article 88 to arbitrarily punish bloggers and critics shows that Vietnam's disrespect for freedom of expression continues unabated".

On 12/03/2012, Mrs. Khuong wrote a four-page letter and had it smuggled to her sister Ho Thi Lan, primarily to reveal that several individuals had assaulted her in prison. On 12/05/2012, Mrs. Lan related the incident as follows: "In the evening of 11/04/2012, after using the restroom, Mrs. Khuong had barely set foot in her cell when an assailant jumped on her and began to beat her. Soon, three other attackers joined the first one in that vicious attack. They hit her in many places, including her private parts. The beating left her with several bruises on her face and caused so much pain to her abdomen that she could not even urinate. She was taken to the prison clinic for treatment, but was not allowed to be X-rayed." Mrs. Lan added that her sister also asked her to distribute the letter widely to the media, "otherwise they would try to kill me".



Immediate Action Needed:

- Please disseminate this material to human rights organizations and foreign governments to help Mrs. Ho Thi Bich Khuong, a former human trafficking victim, an advocate on behalf of trafficking victims, a blogger and activist fighting to bring human rights and justice to the Vietnamese people, a prisoner of conscience, and victim of torture. Please donate or help find sources of support for Mrs. Khuong for her medical treatment and subsistence. You can contact us at bpsos@bpsos.org.