

Adopting Vietnamese Prisoners of Conscience

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Under the Defending Freedom Project, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International and US Commission for International Religious Freedom jointly recruit members of the House of Representatives to adopt prisoners of conscience worldwide. Since July 2013, BPSOS has participated in this project by encouraging adoption of Vietnamese prisoners of conscience in the priority list below.

Tran Vu Anh Binh (m) is a songwriter and musician. He co-founded the Patriotic Youth to promote public consciousness on social justice and civic engagement. The Patriotic Youth comprises of college students, young artists, young professionals, and musicians. Members create blogs and websites to advocate for the respect of human rights, freedom, free elections, and Vietnam's territorial integrity. Binh wrote many songs along those themes and posted them on YouTube. In 2011 the authorities arrested him and a fellow songwriter, Vo Minh Tri, for such YouTube postings. He was sentenced to six years in prison and two years of house arrest on charges of conducting anti-state propaganda.

Paulus Le Van Son (m) is a community organizer and prominent writer for *Vietnam Redemptorist News*. A resident of Hanoi, he is an active community organizer for issues such as HIV and public education; he also serves as member of the John Paul II Group for Pro-Life. His popular personal blog covers issues of social justice, human rights and sovereignty. He was arrested on August 3, 2011 on the charge of "attempting to overthrow the government." His arrest was part of larger crackdown on human-rights defenders; seventeen others were arrested, mostly from Vinh Province.

Bui Thi Minh Hang (f) is a prominent activist who played a leading role in the protests against Chinese territorial claims on the Spratly and Paracel islands in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City between June and August 2011. On November 27, 2011, police arrested Bui Thi Minh Hang allegedly "causing public disorder" because of her silent protest against the arrests of other peaceful protesters. The next day the police ordered her detained without trial and sent her to Thanh Ha Education Center in Vinh Phuc province for 24 months of administrative detention. After a domestic and international outcry, the authorities released Bui Thi Minh Hang in April 2012. After her release, she immediately resumed her human rights campaigning. She also has repeatedly attempted to attend the trials of fellow human rights activists.

On February 11, 2014, police arrested Bui Thi Minh Hang, along with Nguyen Van Minh and Nguyen Thi Thuy Quynh, as the three were travelling from Ho Chi Minh City to Dong Thap Province to visit former prisoner of conscience Nguyen Bac Truyen and his wife on charges of "causing public disorder". On August 26, 2014, the Dong Thap Provincial People's Court

sentenced Bui Thi Minh Hang to 3 years in prison; this conviction was upheld on December 12, 2014.

Nguyen Van Minh (m) is an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist activist who has campaigned for freedom of religion and conscience. He was arrested on February 11, 2014 on charges of “causing public disorder” as he was travelling to visit former prisoner of conscience Nguyen Bac Truyen and his wife. On August 26, 2014, the Dong Thap Provincial People’s Court him two years and six months in prison. He is detained in Dong Thap Province. His wife, Bui Thi Diem Thuy, is also a religious activist whose father, Bui Van Trung, and brother, Bui Van Tham, are currently serving prison terms on politically motivated charges under article 257 of the criminal code for “resisting persons in the performance of their official duties.” They are being persecuted because they follow and support an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist group instead of joining the state-sanctioned one.

The following prisoners of conscience have been recommended to but not yet vetted by the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission:

Nguyen Viet Dung (m), born in 1985, was arrested on April 12, 2015 and charged with “disturbing public order” under Article 245 of the penal code (a charge that could confine him to up to 7 years in prison) for participating in a peaceful demonstration in Hanoi to protest the city’s plan to cut down 6,700 healthy aged trees.

Kim Quoc Hoa (m) is the former editor-in-chief of Nguoi Cao Tuoi (“The Elderly”). He was arrested on February 9, 2015 “abusing freedom and democracy to infringe upon the interests of the state” under Article 258 of the penal code. The Elderly had amassed a following due to its reporting on several cases of alleged official corruption, which included running a story that went viral about wealth amassed through bribery by a former general director of the government inspection office.

Ho Thi Bich Khuong (f) was a victim of labor trafficking to South Korea under the Vietnamese government’s labor export program. In 1999 she became a vocal advocate for victims of illegal property confiscation by the government and migrant workers victimized by labor exploitation. In 2011, the public security detained her for “collecting documents related to grievances and litigation with the intent to produce material critical of the Communist Party of Vietnam”. She was sentenced to five years in prison and three years of house arrest for “propaganda against the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.” In 2011 Human Rights Watch awarded her its prestigious Hellman-Hammett Award, which recognizes writers who had demonstrated courage and conviction in the face of political persecution.

The following prisoners of conscience have been adopted and/or released.

Vo Minh Tri (m) (Adopted by Congressman Michael McCaul (R-TX)), best known by his pen name Viet Khang, co-founded the Patriotic Youth to promote public consciousness on social justice and civic engagement. The Patriotic Youth comprises of college students, young artists, young professionals, and musicians. Tri performed songs that he wrote to advocate for the respect of human rights, freedom, free elections, and Vietnam’s territorial integrity. Two of his songs were

posted on youtube. In 2011 the police arrested him, released him briefly and re-arrested him. After a year in detention, he was sentenced to four years of imprisonment and three years of house arrest.

Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh (m) (Adopted by Congressman Alan Lowenthal (D-CA)) is a Mennonite pastor who was sentenced to 11 years in prison in 2012 for "undermining unity" by maintaining ties with dissident groups and distributing material deemed to have "slandered" government authorities.

Le Quoc Quan (m) (Adopted by Representative Loretta Sanchez (D-CA)) is a blogger, lawyer, and the founder of the Quan and Brothers law firm, which provided legal aid to factory workers and poor people. He was first arrested in March 2007 for alleged subversion under the vague provisions of article 79 of Vietnam's penal code. Following domestic and international outcry, the authorities released him in June 2007, but he remained under constant police surveillance. He was disbarred in 2007 for supposed activities to overthrow the government and his law office was shut. He continued to use his legal skills to comment critically on the persecution of dissidents, such as by publishing a defense brief on behalf of legal scholar Cu Huy Ha Vu before the 2011 trial in which Cu Huy Ha Vu was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for "propaganda against the state." Le Quoc Quan also tried to provide pro-bono legal advice to participants in a politically independent online forum. On August 19, 2012, he was assaulted by two men, one of whom he recognized as a person who had been trailing him for months, and had to be treated in a hospital for his injuries.

Le Quoc Quan was arrested again on December 27, nine days after the BBC published his article criticizing the retention of Article 4 of Vietnam's constitution, which makes the Communist Party preeminent in national political life. The piece, "Constitution or a contract for electricity and water service?" came at a time the authorities were soliciting public input on possible amendment's to Vietnam's constitution. Le Quoc Quan's arrest was justified by trumped up charges of tax evasion, an allegation the Vietnamese authorities have used to prosecute other dissidents. Following domestic and international calls for him to be released, his trial was delayed but, in October 2013, the Hanoi People's Court sentenced him to 30 months' imprisonment, which he is serving in Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi.

Doan Huy Chuong (m), Do Thi Minh Hanh (f) (Adopted by Congressman Chris Van Hollen (D-MD). Do Thi Minh Hanh already released.) and **Nguyen Doan Quoc Hung (m)** are labor activists who were charged with disrupting national security and sentenced to between seven and nine years in prison for organizing workers at a Vietnamese shoe factory in 2010. Government authorities arrested Doan, Do, and Nguyen in early 2010 shortly after they helped organize workers at the My Phong shoe factory in Vietnam, where they distributed a leaflet outlining the striking workers' demands. Authorities held the three organizers for eight months before charging them with threatening national security. On October 28, 2010, 10 days after their indictment, the People's Court of Tra Vinh convicted them and sentenced Doan and Do to seven years in prison and Nguyen to nine years in prison. The organizers were not permitted legal counsel or the opportunity to speak in their own defense. Although they were allowed a lawyer on appeal, the sentence was affirmed by the same court after another closed proceeding.

Throughout their detentions, Doan, Do, and Nguyen have been subjected to serious mistreatment. After arresting the three organizers, the government held them in solitary confinement for months. They have been the victims of repeated beatings, which often occur after one of their frequent prison transfers. As a result, Doan has lost the use of one hand and Do is deaf in one ear. Despite continued poor health—including rashes and liver problems—all three are forced to endure hard labor.

Father Nguyen Van Ly (m) (Adopted by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ)) has spent over 15 years in prison for the causes of religious freedom, democracy and human rights. Initially arrested in September 1977 and sentenced to 20 years in a labor camp near Hue, he was later released but prohibited from engaging in religious activities. He was returned to jail in 2001 when he submitted testimony to the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom opposing a U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Act. On March 30, 2007, in a broadcasted show trial, authorities muzzled him while he tried to defend himself. He is a one of the founders of Bloc 8406 and past editor of an underground publication.

Pastor Duong Kim Khai Duong (m) (Adopted by Representative Ted Poe (R-TX)) is a pastor for the Mennonite Church in Vietnam, a long-time advocate for aggrieved farmers, a democracy activist and member of Viet Tan, an organization advocating for democracy. Since the early 1990's, he has been detained or arrested thirteen times, often while trying to organize prayer sessions. He was jailed in 2004 for starting an “illegal” religious group. Upon his release in 2006, he founded the Mennonite Cattle Shed Congregation in order to advocate for religious freedom and social justice, particularly to provide assistance to farmers so they could petition the government for redress in land disputes or corruption cases in Ben Tre and Dong Thap provinces. He also joined Viet Tan during this period. Pastor Duong Kim Khai was arrested on August 10, 2010 on the charge of “attempting to overthrow the government.” The condition of his health and place of detention were kept from his family by authorities until October 12, 2010, when it received written confirmation of his arrest. On May 30, 2011, he was sentenced to a six-year prison term (later reduced to five years) followed by five-year term of house arrest. In 2011, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that the Hanoi government's detention and conviction of Pastor Duong Kim Khai and six other land activists were in violation of international law.

Tran Huynh Duy Thuc (m) (Adopted by Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)) is a Vietnamese blogger, entrepreneur and businessman, who was arrested in May 2009, and is currently serving a 16 year prison sentence. He was initially charged with theft of a telecommunications device, but the authorities were unable to find any evidence for this, and later charged Tran with “promoting anti-Socialist, anti-government propaganda” and undertaking “activities aimed at subverting the people's government”. He was jailed, along with three other democracy activists, after a trial lasting just one day; his sentence is the longest ever handed down to a dissident in Vietnam. Tran is the founder and CEO of One-Connection Internet, an Internet service provider, and the author of several dissident blogs and articles on Vietnam's economy.

Nguyen Van Lia (m) (Adopted by Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)) is a scholar in Hoa Hao Buddhism, a sect repressed by the Vietnamese authorities. According to state media, he possessed printed materials, CD's, and DVD's criticizing the Vietnamese government's religious record. He had previously met in Saigon with the U.S. Consulate and the U.S. CIRF. He was sentenced to a five-year term on December 13, 2011 on the charge of “abusing democratic freedoms.”

Blogger Ta Phong Tan (f) (Adopted by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)) has been recognized as a symbol for government reform and whistleblowing in Vietnam for her work exposing government corruption. Her arrest has sparked outrage by esteemed organizations such as Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, the US State Department, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. In October 2012 after a trial of just one day, Tan was sentenced to 10 years in prison with an additional 5 years of house arrest upon release. In March 2013, she was honored by Michelle Obama with a 2013 International Women of Courage Award from the US State Department as well as a Hellman/Hammett award from Human Rights Watch. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Tan had helped inspire an awakening of citizen bloggers and journalists in Vietnam, who today are committed to spreading information and alternate opinions to the Vietnamese people.

Cu Huy Ha Vu (m) (Released. Adopted by Representative David Price (D-NC)) is a prominent government critic and human-rights lawyer. He filed unprecedented lawsuits against the government, including suing Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung for violating laws on environmental protection, national security and cultural heritage by approving a Chinese-run bauxite mining project in the Central Highlands. His law firm provided legal assistance to democracy activists and, prior to his arrest, to six Catholics from Con Dau parish who had protested government confiscation of Church properties. He was arrested on November 5, 2010 and on April 4, 2011 was sentenced to seven-years in prison to be followed by three-years of house arrest. The charge was “propaganda against the socialist state.”

Nguyen Tien Trung (m) (Released. Adopted by Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA)) is a Vietnamese blogger and activist who was arrested in July 2009 on charges of disseminating "propaganda against the socialist state" and "organization to attempt to overthrow the people's government". After a show trial in January 2010, that lasted just one day, he was sentenced to seven years in jail and 3 years' probation and is currently in prison in Ho Chi Minh City. Trung has a Masters in I.T from France's Institut National des Sciences Appliquees de Rennes, and during his time there, wrote an open letter to Vietnam's Education Minister, demanding reforms to the country's highly politicized education system. In May 2006, he founded Viet Youth for Democracy, which called on world leaders to remind the Vietnamese government of its commitment to human rights. Trung is also Vice General Secretary of the Democratic Party of Vietnam, a peaceful group not recognized by the one party regime.

Nguyen Van Hai (m) (Released) is well-known in Vietnam and overseas under the pen name Dieu Cay (the Peasant's Tobacco Pipe, a symbol of the Vietnamese mass). In 2007 he co-founded the Club of Free Journalists to promote independent voices free of government's censorship. Soon many authors, writers, composers, artists, scholars and intellectuals joined the club. They started public discussions on issues considered taboos by the government, including opposition to China's expansionism, environmental justice related to bauxite mining in Vietnam's Central Highland, land grabs by corrupt provincial authorities that denied tens of thousands of farmers of their livelihood... In April, 2008 he was arrested on fabricated charges of tax evasion and then sentenced to 2.5 years of imprisonment. He was denied access to legal representation. Upon completion of his sentence, he continued to be detained and then sentenced to another 12 years of imprisonment and 5 years of house arrest on the charge of “propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”. To

mark the World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May, 2012, President Obama mentioned Dieu Cay as illustration: “we must not forget others like blogger Dieu Cay, whose 2008 arrest coincided with a mass crackdown on citizen journalism in Vietnam...”