

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. For 2018, we propose the priority list below.

Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh (f), best known as Blogger Mother Mushroom, is co-founder and coordinator of the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers. Me Nam is a well-known blogger both in the blogger community in Vietnam and internationally. She has been instrumental in human rights education in Vietnam in the past ten years through her blog posts and through her active participation in human rights promotion events off-line. She has written about politically sensitive issues such as police brutality, corruption, and has openly criticized controversial government's policies such as the bauxite mining in the Central Highlands (for which she was arrested for 10 days in 2009), and, more recently, the government handling of the massive fish deaths in Central Vietnam. She was awarded for her advocacy work "the 2015 Civil Rights Defender of the Year" by Civil Rights Defenders and was selected for the International Women of Courage Award in 2017 by the U.S. State Department, though she was unable to accept it in person. Her mother was barred from visiting her in detention. Arrested on October 10, 2016, she was officially charged under Article 88 of the Penal Code (conducting propaganda against the state) and was sentenced to 10 years in prison in June 2017. Her appeal trial was rejected on Nov. 30, 2017, by the people's court of Nha Trang and her 10 years sentence was upheld. She was recently transferred from Khanh Hoa detention centre to Thanh Hoa Prison No. 5.

Nguyen Bac Truyen (m), a peaceful human rights defender in Vietnam and the recipient of the 2011 Hellman Hammett Award of Human Rights Watch. In 2006 he was arrested and sentenced to 3.5 years in prison, plus 2 years of house arrest due to his pro-democracy activism. Since his release from the first prison term, Mr. Truyen focused much of his efforts on defending and promoting religious freedom. As a jurist, he also provided pro bono legal assistance to families of political prisoners, victims of land grab and persecuted religious communities in Vietnam. On July 30 2017, he was abducted on the street and on April 5 2018 was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment, followed by 3 years of house arrest on charge of "carrying out activities aiming to overthrow the government" in the same case as 5 members of Brotherhood for Democracy: human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai and his assistant Le Thu Ha, Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton, Pham Van Troi and Truong Minh Duc. His appeal was denied by the Appellate Court on June 4, 2018. He is currently being held at B14 Detention Center in Hanoi, a thousand mile away from

his wife and family in Saigon. At the time of his arrest, Mr. Truyen was working as a full-time Coordinator of the charitable program for the disabled veterans of the former Republic of Vietnam operated by the Redemptorist Order in Saigon.

Bui Van Trung (m) is the patriarch of a Hoa Hao Buddhist family with a long history of being victim of religious persecution. Several members of his family have been imprisoned due to their faith. Mr. Trung and one of his sons are currently behind bars for the second time. Following the tradition of Hoa Hao Buddhism, in 2005 he built a prayer hall in the yard of his house in An Phu District, An Giang Province, to provide fellow Hoa Hao Buddhists with a place for congregating, studying the Hoa Hao scripture, praying, and engaging in celebrations and other religious rituals. The authorities accused Mr. Trung of opposing the law, which required that all religious entities be registered, and ordered him to close the prayer hall. Mr. Trung considered the prayer hall to be within the privacy of his home and refused to comply. The government has since harassed and physically assaulted his family members and guests to the prayer hall. Failing to force him and his family members to dissolve the prayer hall and join the state-controlled Hoa Hao Buddhist Congregation, in 2012 the government arrested Mr Trung and his son, Bui Van Tham. In January 2013 Mr. Trung was sentenced to four years and his son two and a half years in prison on charges of “opposing officials performing their duty.” In 2014, Mr. Trung’s son-in-law, Nguyen Van Minh, also got arrested and sentenced to two-and-a-half years imprisonment. Less than a year after Mr. Trung’s release from prison, he and his son Tham were arrested again in June 2017 when they and other Buddhist adherents gathered at the family’s prayer hall for the commemoration of the death of his mother. He was tried on 9 February 2018 along with five other Hoa Hao Buddhists under Article 245 of the 1999 Penal Code, "causing public disorder." He and his son each received a six years prison sentence. His daughter, Bui Thi Bich Tuyen, was sentenced to 3 years in prison, and his wife, Le Thi Hen, to 2 years of suspended sentence on account of her poor health. On May 24, 2018, their appeal was denied by a people’s court in An Giang Province and the sentences were upheld.

Hoang Duc Binh (a.k.a. Hoang Binh) (m) is the vice-president of the independent Viet Labor Movement, and a well-known blogger who has covered news on the Formosa-caused environmental disaster in the central coastal provinces of Vietnam. On Monday 15 May 2017, Mr Binh was travelling in a car with Catholic priest Nguyen Dinh Thuc from the Song Ngoc parish in Dien Chau district to Vinh City. Their car was stopped by police in Dien Chau district and police violently removed Binh from the car. According to the arrest order, Mr Binh faced the charges of "resisting persons in the performance of their official duties" under Article 257 and "Abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, the legitimate rights and interests of organizations and/or citizens" under Article 258 of the 1999 Penal Code (abuse of democratic freedoms). On February 6, 2018, he was sentenced to 14 years in prison: seven years for each of the charges. On April 24, 2018, his appeal was denied and his 14 year sentence was upheld by a court in Nghe An province.

Pastor A Dao (m) is a pastor of the Montagnard Evangelical Church of Christ. He advocated for religious freedom for his fellow church members in the Central Highlands and elsewhere. In August 2016, he attended a conference on Freedom of Religion in Southeast Asia in Timor-Leste, along with the ASEAN Civil Society Conference and the ASEAN People's Forum. He

was arrested shortly after his return to Vietnam. On April 28, 2017 he was sentenced to five years in prison for "helping individuals to escape abroad illegally" under Article 91, a charge he denied. During a brief meeting with him just before trial, his wife noticed bruises on his face and was told by him that he had been tortured during pre-trial detention.

Tran Thi Nga (f), also known as Thuy Nga, is a blogger, a citizen journalist and long-time labor rights activist in Vietnam who often shared articles and videos on social media highlighting ongoing police brutality, human trafficking, unlawful land grabbing, environmental problems, and political corruption. For a decade, Mrs Tran Thi Nga took it upon herself to defend abused workers and carried out her fight against injustice despite intimidation and assault by the local authorities. In 2014, in the presence of her two little boys she was assaulted on the street in Hanoi by five plainclothes police armed with metal pipes. The attack was so vicious that it left her with a broken arm and a broken leg, a dislocated shoulder, and sprained fingers. She spent months in rehabilitation but never fully recovered -- she now walks with a limp. In August 2015, she was dragged from a bus and beaten by plainclothes police after visiting a recently released political prisoner. Yet, she continued to speak out against police violence. Thuy Nga was arrested on January 21, 2017 and charged with "defaming the administration" and "spreading anti-State propaganda". On July 25, 2017 she was sentenced to nine years in prison followed by five years of house arrest under Article 88 of the Penal Code. Her appeal was denied by the Appellate Court on December 22, 2017. Thuy Nga continues to be subjected to abuses and mistreatments at Gia Trung prison in Gia Lai province, about 750 miles – more than 24-hours travel with multiple bus transfers – away from her husband and two small children, age 5 and 7. She has been repeatedly punished and put in solitary confinement. After 17 months with several petitions by Thuy Nga's husband, her two little boys were allowed to visit their mother in mid-June for 15 minutes for the first time since her arrest.

Nguyen Huu Vinh (m) is best known as blogger Anh Ba Sam (Talking Nonsense). His blog was among the most popular in Vietnam. On May 5, 2014 he was arrested together with his staff member Ms. Nguyen Thi Minh Thuy, on charges of "abusing democratic freedoms" under Article 258 of the 1999 Penal Code for operating a website that provides links to social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural issues in Vietnam. The two were held for almost two years without trial. On March 23, 2016 he was sentenced to five years in prison and Ms. Minh Thuy to three years. Observers, including a German member of Parliament, were denied access to the trial.

Tran Anh Kim (m) is a former prisoner of conscience, army officer and writer. It is believed that the first time he was arrested on December 2009 was for his connection with a group that he was about to launch: "Citizens Raising the Flag of Democracy" (*Luc Luong Quoc Dan Dung Co Dan Chu*). Supporter of Bloc 8406 -- an internet based pro-democracy group --, he was previously sentenced to five and half years of imprisonment followed by three years of house arrest for his peaceful activities to raise public awareness of corruption. He was released in January 2015 but re-arrested 8 months later, on September 21, 2015. He was sentenced on December 16, 2016 to thirteen years in prison and four years of probation on release under Article 79 "Plotting to overthrow the government." He is in poor and deteriorating health.

Pastor Y Yich (m) is an evangelical pastor from the Central Highlands. He was arrested for the first time on 18 December 2006 for "plotting against the government." After serving four years in Xuan Phuoc Prison, he was discharged on 18 September 2011 and put under probation for three years. He resumed proselytizing to his Bahnar ethnic community and was arrested for the second time on 13 May 2013. This time he was sentenced to twelve years in prison. As a result of being beaten and tortured in prison, his health has deteriorated. He has been denied medical treatment for high blood pressure, rheumatism, and stomach inflammation; prison authorities have refused to deliver to him medicine sent by his family.

Do Thi Hong (f) is a member of the An Dan Dai Dao, a Buddhist sect founded in 1969 but outlawed after April 1975. The religious group ran an eco-tourism company at the Da Bia Tourist Resort in Phu Yen Province. They signed a contract with the local authorities to engage in protecting the forest and environment. The group believed in the prophecies of Nguyen Binh Khiem, a 16th century Vietnamese seer similar to Nostradamus, and dreamed of building a new "Utopia" in which science, nature and humankind would be harmoniously balanced. They organized conferences and produced leaflets to disseminate their beliefs. Mrs Do Thi Hong was arrested in February 14, 2012 along with 22 other members of the sect. They were all charged and convicted under Article 79 of the Penal Code "Plotting to overthrow the government." She was sentenced to thirteen years in prison, followed by a five year probationary period. She is detained in Binh Phuoc prison and reported to be in poor health.