

Red Flag Associations

A threat to Catholic communities in Vietnam

The rise of the Red Flag Associations in Nghe An Province is closely related to the government's suppression of popular protests against the Taiwanese-owned Formosa Steel Plant.

In early April 2016 residents in communities surrounding the Formosa Steel Plant in Ha Tinh Province reported seeing a large level of waste dumped by the plant into the ocean. According to Amnesty International, as many as 270,000 people, including fishermen, women, and others who rely on the fishing industry for their livelihood as well as that of their families, were affected by the resulting ecological disaster.



As mass protests broke out against the Formosa Steel Plant, in which demonstrators demanded environmental justice and fair compensation, the government violently attacked them and arrested those suspected of being key organizers. The Vietnamese government acted to defend the steel plant, attempting to deflect blame from the company and pointing to other alleged causes. In late June 2017, the government finally confirmed the widespread public view that the Formosa Steel Plant, owned by the Taiwanese Formosa Plastics Group, was the source of discharges of toxic waste into coastal waters. At the same time, the government announced Formosa Steel Plant's agreement to pay 500 million USD in fines and compensation.



This announcement was met with public anger because the compensation amount would sustain most affected families for only a few months. The majority of the half million Catholics in the Diocese of Vinh live in fishing communities severely affected by the disaster. Complaints they filed against the Formosa Steel Plant were summarily dismissed by judicial system. Without any other recourse, they took to the streets to demand justice. In response, the government has targeted individuals viewed as demonstration

organizers for harassment, detention, and/or imprisonment. At the same time, entire communities have been victims of mob terror in the form of Red Flag Associations, non-state actors that serve as the government's instruments of repression.

Recommendation: The Vietnamese Government should investigate, prosecute and punish all Red Flag Association members and all colluding government officials for gross violations of the rights of citizens.

For more information, visit: <http://dvov.org/catholicism/> or contact bpsos@bpsos.org.