



International Panel of  
Parliamentarians  
for Freedom of Religion  
or Belief



H.E. Mr. Nguyen Xuan Phuc,  
Prime Minister of Viet Nam  
16 Le Hong Phong Street,  
Ba Dinh District,  
Ha Noi, Viet Nam

30 July 2020

Your Excellency,

**Re: Immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển**

We, the undersigned parliamentarians from around the world, have the honour to write to Your Excellency to request that Your Excellency take all the necessary measures to secure the immediate and unconditional release of religious freedom advocate, Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển, and to allow all independent religious organisations in Viet Nam to freely conduct religious activities without fear of persecution, harassment and imprisonment.

It has been three years since Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển was abducted by the Vietnamese police, on 30 July 2017. He was subsequently held in incommunicado detention until his trial on 5 April 2018, when he was sentenced, along with five other human rights activists, to 11 years' imprisonment and three years of house arrest under Article 79 of the 1999 Penal Code for "*carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration.*" His appeal was rejected and Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển is now in An Diem Prison, Dai Loc district, in Quang Nam Province.

[This is not the first time that Mr. Truyển has been imprisoned for his peaceful activities.](#) He was previously arrested in 2006 and released in 2010 after serving a sentence of three years and six months for "*conducting propaganda*" against the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mr. Truyển is a Hòa Hảo Buddhist and a long-standing defender of human rights, including the rights of religious minorities. He founded the Vietnamese Political & Religious Prisoners Friendship Association, an organisation dedicated to assisting prisoners of conscience and their families. As a legal expert, he rendered pro-bono legal assistance to families of political prisoners,



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victims of land grabbing and persecuted religious communities in Southern Viet Nam. In 2011, he received the Hellman/Hammett award from Human Rights Watch in honour of his human rights advocacy. As a result of his work, Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển has faced years of harassment and reprisals.

We are extremely concerned that the charge against him is completely unfounded and his imprisonment is in direct breach of Viet Nam's obligations under Article 24 of its Constitution and the various international instruments that Viet Nam has ratified, in particular, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 22 of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.

Further, we are troubled by the fact that Mr. Truyển's sentence and imprisonment illustrate outstanding issues relating to the right to freedom of religion or belief in Viet Nam. While we recognise some progresses made by Your Excellency's government, including by allowing registered religious organisations to hold large festivals in public and what appears to be a decrease in the number of attacks by government-affiliated groups against Catholic communities, we are, however, extremely concerned by continued reports of persecution of individuals and religious and ethnic groups solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion or belief

In particular, we are deeply concerned by instances of intimidation, harassment, physical violence, destruction of property, and imprisonment against, Hmong and Montagnard Christians, Catholics, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Hòa Hảo Buddhists, Cao Dai adherents, Khmer Krom Buddhists, An Dan Dai Dao, Duong Van Minh, and Falun Gongs solely for peacefully exercising their religious beliefs. In addition, [the 2016 law on Belief and Religion](#), which requires religious groups to register with the government, allows for their harassment.

As the current Chair of ASEAN, we urge Your Excellency to show exemplary leadership in the region by guaranteeing the fundamental freedoms of its people and ensuring that its laws and policies are coherent with its international human rights obligations and the spirit of a people-centered, people-oriented ASEAN.

In view of the above, we urge Your Excellency to:



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- Immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển, and everyone who is currently imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights including their rights to freedom of religion or belief;
- Ensure that all religious organisations and groups, particularly those that are unregistered and unrecognised, are able to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief and conduct religious activities freely, and that they are not threatened, tortured or ill-treated, detained or imprisoned for the peaceful practice of their faith; and
- Ensure all domestic legislation addressing religious affairs, including the Law on Belief and Religion, is brought into conformity with international human rights law, including the ICCPR.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,  
List of Signatories

*Please note that any parliamentarian who has signed this letter has done so in their personal capacity and not in any way representing their political party, government, organisation, etc.*