

2020 intimidation and reprisal report to be presented to UN Human Rights Council on Sep 30

Press Release

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Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, is scheduled to present this year's intimidation and reprisal report (Report No. A/HRC/45/36) at the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council. The presentation, tentatively set to start at 4:30pm (Geneva) on September 30, will be webcasted at: <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/>.

This year, Vietnam ranks second, only behind China, in the number of reported cases of intimidation and reprisal. Of the 16 cases in Vietnam, 12 were "members of independent religious communities and human rights defenders" who participated or attempted to participate in the 2019 annual international conference in Bangkok on freedom of religion or belief in South-East Asia, which included communication with and training by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Upon arrival in Danang City, five SEAFORB participants were detained at the airport, taken into separate rooms, and subjected to questioning for three to four hours each. Of the two who were subsequently placed under police surveillance, one was caught and beaten severely as he attempted to seek temporary refuge in another location.

The report also features two female human rights defenders who, upon return to Vietnam, were detained for questioning about their public engagement with the United Nations in Geneva. Both reported that their passports and other personal documents had been confiscated by agents of the Ministry of Public Security.

There were also two follow-up cases, where acts of intimidation and reprisal had been reported in prior years: Pham Chi Dung, co-founder of the Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam, and Nguyen Bac Truyen, a Hoa Hao Buddhist and human rights jurist. The former has been kept in temporary detention since November 2019 while the latter is serving an eleven-year prison sentence on spurious charges of "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration."

In response to the report, the Vietnamese government denied any acts of intimidation or harassment, dismissing the victims' claims as untrue.

On October 18, 2019, 71 countries issued a joint statement supporting the UN Secretary-General's call for states parties to stop punishing citizens for reporting human rights violations to the UN:

"We strongly condemn any act of intimidation and reprisal, whether online or offline, against individuals and groups who cooperate, seek to cooperate, or have cooperated with the UN," said Ambassador Karen Pierce, UK Permanent Representative to the UN, on behalf of the governments endorsing the joint statement.

UN human rights bodies and mechanisms rely on reports from civil society and human rights defenders to monitor states parties' compliance with international human rights standards.

“When those engaging with the UN face intimidation, threats, imprisonment and worse for doing so, we all lose, and the credibility of the UN is damaged,” Ms. Kehris wrote on the OHCHR’s website. “The UN as a whole has a collective responsibility to stop and prevent these reprehensible acts.”

Ms. Kehris's presentation of the intimidation and reprisal report will be available via Facebook livestream, with Vietnamese-language summary translation, at:

<https://www.facebook.com/VNAdvocacy/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Vietnamcivilrights>

To read the 2020 intimidation and reprisal report, see:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Reprisals/Pages/ReprisalsIndex.aspx>