

August 12, 2021

The Honorable Kamala Harris
Vice President of the United States of America
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1800 G Street NW.
Washington, DC 20502

Religious freedom and human rights advocates call for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển

Dear Vice President Harris:

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, welcome the White House's recent announcement that you will be visiting Vietnam later this month. Among the important issues to be discussed with your Vietnamese counterparts, we urge you to press for the release of human rights defender Nguyễn Bắc Truyển and other prisoners of conscience in Vietnam.

In 2018 Nguyễn Bắc Truyển was sentenced to eleven years in prison and three years' house arrest for "carrying out activities that aim to overthrow the people's government" under article 79 of the penal code.

The charges against Truyển were completely unfounded and unjust. Truyển, a Hoa Hao Buddhist, has dedicated his life to providing pro-bono legal assistance and support to oppressed religious communities, victims of land grabs, and families of political prisoners. He is deeply committed to the right to freedom of religion or belief, and has worked to build capacity for religious communities so that they can fully exercise their basic rights.

Truyển also meticulously collected evidence submitted to the different UN mandate holders, and provided valuable assistance to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief during the Special Rapporteur's July 2014 visit in Vietnam.

In retaliation for his human rights work, Nguyễn Bắc Truyển was arrested for the first time in 2006 and sentenced to three and a half years followed by two years' house arrest. Upon his release he continued to assist prisoners of conscience and their families; the authorities responded by harassing Truyển and his wife, Ms. Bùi Thị Kim Phượng. In the latest Intimidation and Reprisal Report in 2020, the UN Secretary-General expressed concern regarding Truyển's frail health and the lack of proper medical care in prison.

Truyen's case has drawn international attention and support. He has been adopted as a prisoner of conscience by [Gyde Jensen](#), Chair of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Committee of Germany's Bundestag, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) under its [Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project](#), and Representative [Zoe Lofgren](#) under the Defending Freedom Project of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. On August 13, 2020, 65 current and former [parliamentarians](#) from 28 countries sent a joint letter to Vietnam's Prime Minister, calling for Nguyễn Bắc Truyển's immediate and unconditional release.

Tragically, Nguyễn Bắc Truyển is not the only prisoner of conscience in Vietnam.

[Bùi Văn Trung](#) and his son [Bùi Văn Tâm](#), also Hoa Hao Buddhists, were each sentenced to six years in prison in February 2018 after peacefully protesting against the authorities'

suppression of religious freedom; Tham has reportedly been attacked in prison by another inmate.

[Phan Văn Thu](#), a leader of the banned An Dan Dai Dao Buddhist Sect, is serving a life sentence and is reportedly suffering from multiple health conditions in prison.

Montagnard Christian [Pastor Y Yich](#) was imprisoned from 2006 to 2011 and was arrested for the second time in May 2013. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison where he has reportedly been beaten and tortured.

[Hoàng Đức Bình](#), a Catholic activist and blogger, is serving 14 years in prison for participating in peaceful protests about the Formosa-created environmental disaster in 2016.

Human rights organisations estimate that there are over 200 prisoners of conscience in the country, including an increasing number of individuals detained in connection with exercising their right to freedom of expression online, and particularly on Facebook. The Vietnamese authorities continue to suppress the rights to freedom of expression, association, and religion or belief, in violation of Vietnam's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We respectfully ask that you highlight the case of Nguyễn Bắc Truyển and call for his release, and the release of all people imprisoned or detained for exercising their basic civil and political rights, at meetings with the Vietnamese leadership, in keeping with the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to championing human rights in foreign policies.

Sincerely,

Individuals (*):

Bui Thi Kim Phuong
Wife of Nguyễn Bắc Truyển, Religious Prisoner of Conscience, Vietnam

Vo Van Thanh Liem
Abbot, Hoa Hao Buddhist Quang Minh Temple, Vietnam
Former Religious Prisoner of Conscience in Vietnam

The Most Venerable Thich Thien Minh
Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam
Former Religious Prisoner of Conscience in Vietnam

The Most Venerable Thich Nhat Ban
Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam
Former Religious Prisoner of Conscience in Vietnam

Rev. Joseph Maria Le Quoc Thang
Parish Priest, Phu Hanh Parish, Catholic Church, Vietnam
Former Secretary, Committee for Peace and Justice, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam

Rev. Nguyen Vu Viet
Parish Priest, St. Petersburg Parish, Florida, United States
Former Religious Prisoner of Conscience in Vietnam

Rev. Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
Former Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett
President, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights & Justice
Former Chair, US Commission on International Religious Freedom

Nina Shea, Director
Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom
Former Vice-Chair, US Commission on International Religious Freedom

Jared Genser
Adjunct Professor of Law, Georgetown University Law Center
Founder of Freedom Now

W. Cole Durham, Jr.
Founding Director, International Center for Law and Religion Studies
Brigham Young University

Amjad Mahmood Khan
Founding Partner at Brown, Neri, Smith & Khan LLP
National Director of Public Affairs, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA

Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang
CEO & President, Boat People SOS (BPSOS)
Laureate of 2011 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award

Edward Charles Brown
Secretary General, Stefanus Alliance International, Norway

Jan Figel
Former Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU
Former Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia
Former Vice President of the Slovak Parliament

The Honorable Kasit Piromya
Former Foreign Minister of Thailand
Former Ambassador to the United States
Member of ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Heiner Bielefeldt
Chair of Human Rights and Human Rights Politics Institute for Political Science University
of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany
Former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

MP Gyde Jensen (FDP)
Chairwoman, Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid
German Bundestag

MP Martin Patzelt (CDU/CSU)
Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, Rapporteur on Southeast Asia
German Bundestag

MP Margarete Bause
Spokesperson, Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid
Alliance 90/The Greens
German Bundestag

Dr Ewelina U. Ochab
Co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response

Professor The Lord Alton
House of Lords, United Kingdom

The Baroness Cox
Independent Member of the House of Lords, United Kingdom

Mary Shanthi Dairiam
Former CEDAW Committee member, Malaysia

Irene Xavier
Executive Director, Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor, Malaysia

Sarajun Hoda Abdul Hassan
Social Activist
Former Deputy Chair of Bersih 2, Malaysia

Andrew Khoo
Advocate & Solicitor
Co-chair, Constitutional Law Committee of Bar Council, Malaysia

Hon. Teo Nie Ching
Member of Parliament, Malaysia

Hon. Kasthuri Patto
Member of Parliament, Malaysia

Prof. Wong Chin Huat
Political scientist, Malaysia

Wai Wai Nu
Founder & Executive Director, Women's Peace Network
Former Rohingya Prisoner of Conscience in Myanmar

(*) Institutional Affiliation given for purposes of identification only

Organizations:

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights

Boat People SOS – Religious Freedom Project

Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) - Malaysia

Coalition to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA)

Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam

CSW, United Kingdom

Freedom House

Human Rights Watch

International Christian Concern

Jubilee Campaign

VETO! Human Rights Defenders' Network - Germany

Vietnam Coalition Against Torture

Vietnamese Women for Human Rights