



Viet Tan (Vietnam Reform Party)

*With members inside Vietnam and around the world,
Viet Tan aims to establish democracy and reform the country through peaceful means.*

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Vietnamese activists still in prison for asserting nation's claims

Three months after their arrests, at least eight Vietnamese democracy activists continue to be held without formal charges for protesting government policies toward China. From September 10-23, 2008, Vietnamese security police detained Nguyen Xuan Nghia, Pham Thanh Nghien, Vu Hung, Ngo Quynh, Tran Duc Thach, Pham Van Troi, Nguyen Van Tuc, and Nguyen Van Tinh.

They were among 100 Vietnamese military veterans and democracy activists who signed or supported a petition calling on the communist party and government to repudiate a 50-year old diplomatic note issued by North Vietnamese prime minister Pham Van Dong recognizing the People's Republic of China's claim over the entire South China Sea. This note, issued on September 14, 1958, contradicted Vietnam's historical ownership and the then legal standing of North Vietnam.

In recent days, the Hanoi foreign ministry implicitly refuted the Pham Van Dong cable by reaffirming Vietnam's claims over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. Yet Vietnamese citizens who express public concern for the nation's territorial integrity have been routinely persecuted. The jailing of the activists represents not only a violation of human rights, but also the Hanoi regime's subservience to Beijing on issues of national sovereignty.

After three months in detention, none of the democracy activists have been allowed family visits. Following is what can be confirmed about their condition:

- Nguyen Xuan Nghia, age 59, is being held at the B14 prison in Hanoi after being arrested on September 11. A writer and leader of the pro-democracy Bloc 8406, he is a past recipient of Human Rights Watch's Hellman Hammett award.
- Pham Thanh Nghien, age 31, is being held at Tran Phu prison in Hai Phong. She was arrested on September 18 after organizing a sit-in at home to protest the intimidating police presence around her residence.
- Vu Hung, an elementary school teacher from Ha Tay province, is currently held at Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi. He was arrested on September 18 and verbally accused of committing "propaganda against the state."
- Ngo Quynh, age 24, is a university student who was involved in the planned demonstrations against the Beijing Olympic Torch Relay. He is being held at the B14 prison camp in Hanoi. In June, he was beaten by police and subjected to a public "denunciation" session for visiting a fellow democracy activist.

- Tran Duc Thach, age 46, is a well known poet. He was arrested on September 10 and is being held at Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi.
- Pham Van Troi, age 36, is an engineer and member of the Committee for Human Rights in Vietnam. He was arrested on September 10 and is being held at the B14 prison camp in Hanoi.
- Nguyen Van Tuc, age 44, is a farmer and land rights activist who helped publicize rural protests against government corruption and land grabs. He was arrested on September 10 and is being held at the B14 prison camp in Hanoi.
- Nguyen Van Tinh, age 66, was previously jailed for organizing against the regime. He was arrested on September 23 and is being held at the B14 prison camp in Hanoi.

In addition to the individuals above, countless other Vietnamese citizens remain in jail or under house arrest for their peaceful expression, religious beliefs, or political activities.

On the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—of which the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a signatory—we urge the international community to pressure the Hanoi government to release these and all other prisoners of conscience.

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