

Nguyễn Tấn Dũng
Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Office of the State
1 Bach Thao
Hanoi, Vietnam

22 May 2013

Dear Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng,

We, the undersigned organisations, are seriously concerned over the appeals trial on Thursday, 23 May 2013 of eight human rights activists from the Catholic organisation Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, namely: Ho Duc Hoa, Paulus Le Son, Nguyen Van Duyet, Ho Van Oanh, Nguyen Dinh Cuong, Nguyen Xuan Anh, Thai Van Dung, and Tran Minh Nhat. We question the legitimacy of the forthcoming trial, and we condemn the reported ill treatment of the activists since they have been in detention.

We were alarmed that these activists, along with six others, were dealt severe custodial penalties. The conviction of the fourteen activists appears to be part of a disturbing trend of ongoing persecution against those practicing their right to free expression in Vietnam.

These activists, many of whom are bloggers and citizen journalists, were charged under Article 79 of the Vietnamese Penal Code for "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration." The criminal activities the group are said to have engaged in include writing commentary that is critical of the Government and distributing this information on the Internet, and both participating in and encouraging peaceful protest.

These activities should not be punished as criminal offences, but are all activities that Vietnam is obliged to protect and promote as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICCPR protects the right to freedom of expression (Article 19), the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 21), and the right to freedom of association (Article 22).

We call on the Government of Vietnam to immediately release the detained activists and to reverse the convictions for all fourteen. We also call on the Government of Vietnam to ensure the well-being of the activists while they are detained; guarantee just legal proceedings; and to investigate and hold to account those responsible for threats and harassment against them.

Sincerely,



Agnès Callamard
Executive Director
ARTICLE 19



Jillian York
Director for International
Freedom of Expression
Electronic Frontier Foundation



Mary Lawlor
Director
Front Line Defenders



Peter Noorlander
Executive Director
Media Legal Defence Initiative

CC:

Minister Nguyễn Thái Bình
Ministry of Home Affairs

Minister Hà Hùng Cường
Ministry of Justice

Minister Nguyễn Bắc Sơn
Ministry of Information and Communications

H.E. Lê Lương Minh
Secretary General of ASEAN

Mr. Frank La Rue
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection
of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Mr. Maina Kiai
Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom
of peaceful assembly and of association

Mr. Malick Sow
Chair-Rapporteur for the Working Group of Arbitrary Detention

Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief