

Testimony Submitted to the Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
Hearing: *'A Bad Year for Human Rights in Vietnam'*
June 7, 2018
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Dear Chairman, Members of the Committee, friends,

I am honored to be invited to testify before you today. The last time I presented testimony to Congress on Vietnam was at the time of normalization of relations with the U.S., and I am sad to observe that the progress in human rights we hoped closer relations might bring has not been realized. To the contrary, we have seen sharp declines in recent years.

Today's hearing, and the testimony of other witnesses, make clear that human rights in Vietnam are deeply restricted in almost every area.

The Communist Party of Vietnam continues to maintain a monopoly on political power and suppresses every conceivable challenge to its authority or prestige, equating its self-preservation with "national security." All basic rights, including freedom of speech, opinion, press, association, and religion, are conditioned on the supremacy of the Party and accordingly restricted. Those who try to assert their rights against authority, promote rights awareness, or write or speak about rights in any medium face harassment, intimidation, physical assault, and imprisonment.

Repression is not strictly partisan or ideological; criticism of the status quo is enough to bring retribution. Farmers continue to lose land to development projects without adequate compensation, and workers are not allowed to form independent unions. The entire system of enforcement system serves the interests of those in power. The courts are not independent; police use torture and beatings to extract confessions; plainclothes thugs are deployed to harm and intimidate people when arrest or more formal confrontation is deemed inconvenient. Once detained, people may be further physically tortured, ill-treated, denied family visits, adequate food or needed medical care. State-run drug rehabilitation centers exploit detainees as laborers making goods for local markets and export.

Despite all this, increasing numbers of bloggers and activists have called publicly for democracy and greater freedoms. But Vietnam is not letting them speak.

In recent years, the government has arrested and criminally prosecuted an increasing number of people for simply saying things critical of the government. In 2017, police arrested at least 41 people by our count for sweeping "national security" offenses that are often used to punish critical speech and peaceful activism. In the first 5 months of 2018, the courts convicted at least 26 people for political offenses, sentencing them to between 2 and 15 years in prison. Although it is always difficult to obtain reliable figures, our impression is that the trend in numbers of people being arrested and later convicted have been increasing. And the harshness of their sentences appears to have increased as well.

Vietnam denominates many of these people as 'criminals.' But in many of the cases we've seen, the underlying acts for which people have been charged—writing articles critiquing the government, handing out pamphlets—are acts which all human beings have a right to engage in, under human rights treaties that Vietnam has freely signed and ratified.

And there is no sign of change or progress. To the contrary, Vietnam's legislature is scheduled to pass a cybersecurity law on June 12 that will provide yet another way people who criticize the government or the Party can be silenced and punished, and it will enlist local and foreign companies in this suppression.

Mr. Chairman, our chief recommendation to this committee, and to the US government in general, is to speak more forcefully and publicly to the government of Vietnam about the problems, and to use the whole of the US government to do so. Every congressional office, and every federal agency that engages with Vietnam--whether on trade, military assistance, hardware and software transfers, education or any other subject--should be expressing deep concern on human rights to its counterparts. They should be saying:

'We see what you are doing. And it is tremendously disappointing to us. The fact that your government continues to beat, detain and incarcerate people for dissent or religious conviction more than two decades since normalization of relations is a constant source of injury to the relationship between our country and yours. Your actions imperil our security and economic relationship, a problem which in the context of an increasingly dominant China, is not a good thing for you, and not a good thing for us.'

Congress should send delegations to Vietnam who can speak to these concerns face to face. We also recommend that you list key cases of concern that you would like to see resolved. Tell them that you know whom they are detaining. We suggest you raise cases like **Tran Huynh Duy Thuc**, a 51 year old man who is serving 16 years in prison for calling for a democracy and a multi-party political system in Vietnam. **Nguyen Van Dai**, 48, sentenced to 15 years in prison for being affiliated with a pro-democracy group. **Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh**, 38, also known as "Mother Mushroom", a woman sentenced to 10 years in prison for advocating on social and political issues including land confiscation, displacement of communities, police brutality, and freedom of expression. **Hoang Duc Binh**, 34, a young man sentenced to 14 years in prison for his activism to promote the rights of workers and fishermen in the context of the disastrous 2016 Formosa toxic spill.

We would also suggest you raise the case of **Ngo Hao**, a 70 year old human rights and democracy activist currently serving a 15-year sentence after writing articles calling for a transition to democracy in Vietnam. According to Ngo Hao's family, he is suffering from poor health including high blood pressure, gastric ulcers, and high cholesterol.

In some instances, pressure like this on specific cases can lead authorities to speed parole or improve the conditions of prisoners. In fact, we have spoken to former prisoners who have told us that the fact that outside pressure was being placed on the government, in their cases, had practical and positive impacts on their treatment, and was also comforting on a psychological level.

We also suggest that should the National Assembly enact the cybersecurity law that will make online dissent even more dangerous and enlist the complicity of US corporations in Vietnamese repression, that you react, and react strongly in protest. Vietnam's actions of this nature should influence how Congress views its role in keeping US technology and industry from being used for the purpose of stifling rights. Freedom of speech, freedom of information, freedom of opinion and freedom of conscience are values that are central to this country, to its people, its democracy, its security, and therefore to its foreign relations.

Attached to the written form of my testimony is a full list of 140 prisoners detained for merely exercising their rights who are currently known to Human Rights Watch. Each one of them deserves your attention.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today.

Appendix:
Human Rights Watch List of Political Prisoners
as of May 2018

The following is a list of people imprisoned in Vietnam for expressing critical views of the government, taking part in peaceful protests, participating in religious groups not approved by the authorities, or joining civil or political organizations that the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam deems threats to its monopoly on power. This list only includes people who have been convicted and remain in prison and does not include the significant number of detainees who have been arrested, are currently facing trial, and have not yet been convicted. It is also almost certainly incomplete, as it only includes convictions that Human Rights Watch has been able to document.

Due to difficulties in obtaining information about convictions and sentences in Vietnam, this list may differ from those compiled by other organizations, and such differences do not necessarily reflect inaccuracies. Vietnam should be urged to open its legal system – including official records and proceedings – to public scrutiny.

1. Bùi Hiếu Võ, born 1962
2. Trần Thị Xuân, born 1976
3. Nguyễn Việt Dũng, born 1986
4. Nguyễn Văn Túc, born 1964
5. Nguyễn Văn Đài, born 1969
6. Nguyễn Trung Tôn, born 1972
7. Trương Minh Đức, born 1960
8. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển, born 1968
9. Lê Thu Hà, born 1982

10. Phạm Văn Trội, born 1972
11. Bùi Văn Trung, born 1964
12. Bùi Văn Thâm, born 1987
13. Bùi Thị Bích Tuyền, born 1982
14. Nguyễn Hoàng Nam, born 1982
15. Lê Hồng Hạnh, born 1979
16. Hoàng Đức Bình, born 1983
17. Nguyễn Nam Phong, born 1980
18. Hồ Văn Hải (a.k.a Dr. Hồ Hải), born 1959
19. Vũ Quang Thuận (a.k.a Võ Phù Đông), born 1966
20. Nguyễn Văn Điền (a.k.a Điền Ái Quốc), born 1983
21. Trần Hoàng Phúc, born 1994
22. Vương Văn Thả, born 1969
23. Vương Thanh Thuận, born 1990
24. Nguyễn Nhật Trường, born 1985
25. Nguyễn Văn Thượng, born 1985
26. Tạ Tấn Lộc, born 1975
27. Nguyễn Quang Thanh, born 1983
28. Huỳnh Hữu Đạt, born 1970
29. Nguyễn Văn Tuấn, born 1984
30. Nguyễn Văn Nghĩa, born 1978
31. Phạm Long Đại, born 1996
32. Đoàn Thị Bích Thủy, born 1972
33. Trương Thị Thu Hằng, born 1984
34. Trương Thị Bích Ngọc, born 1994
35. Nguyễn Tấn An, born 1992
36. Huỳnh Thị Kim Quyên, born 1979
37. Nguyễn Ngọc Quý, born 1992
38. Phạm Văn Trọng, born 1994
39. Nguyễn Thanh Bình, born 1994
40. Nguyễn Văn Hóa, born 1995
41. Phan Kim Khánh, born 1993
42. Nguyễn Văn Oai, born 1981
43. Trần Thị Nga, born 1977
44. Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh (a.k.a Mẹ Năm), born 1979
45. Rơ Ma Đai (Ama Pôn) born 1989
46. Puih Bop (Ama Phun), born 1959
47. Ksor Kam (Ama H'Trum), born 1965
48. Rơ Lan Kly (Ama Blan), born 1962
49. Đinh Nông (Bã Pol), born 1965
50. Trần Anh Kim, born 1949
51. Lê Thanh Tùng, born 1968
52. Ksor Phit, born 1970
53. Siu Đik, born 1970
54. Nguyễn Hữu Quốc Duy, born 1985
55. Ksor Púp (Ama Hyung)

56. Siu Doang, born 1983
57. A Jen, born 1984
58. A Tik, born 1952
59. Đinh Kữ, born 1972
60. Thin, born 1979
61. Gyun, born 1980
62. Ngô Thị Minh Ước, born 1959
63. Nguyễn Hữu Vinh (a.k.a Ba Sàm), born 1956
64. Nguyễn Tiến Thịnh
65. Hoàng Văn Thu
66. Nguyễn Lê Châu Bình
67. Nguyễn Văn Thông, born 1965
68. Kpuih Khuông
69. Rmah Khil
70. Rmah Bloanh
71. A Kuin (a.k.a Bã Chăn), born 1974
72. Ngr (a.k.a Bã Săn), born 1972
73. Điều B'ré (a.k.a Bap Bum), born 1969
74. Điều By Ở, born 1967
75. Đinh Yum, born 1963
76. Rơ Mah Plă (a.k.a Rmah Blă; a.k.a Ama Em), born 1968
77. Siu Tinh (a.k.a Ama Khâm), born 1978
78. Run
79. Chi
80. Đinh Lý
81. Đinh Ngo
82. Thạch Thuol, born 1985
83. Ngô Hào, born 1948
84. A Tách (a.k.a Bã Hlôl), born 1959
85. Rung, born 1979
86. Jơnh (a.k.a Chinh), born 1952
87. A Hyum (a.k.a Bã Kôl), born 1940
88. Byuk, born 1945
89. Đinh Lứ, born 1976
90. Đinh Hrôn, born 1981
91. Đinh Nguyên Kha, born 1988
92. Phan Văn Thu, born 1948
93. Lê Duy Lộc, born 1956
94. Vương Tấn Sơn, born 1953
95. Đoàn Đình Nam, born 1951
96. Nguyễn Kỳ Lạc, born 1951
97. Tạ Khu, born 1947
98. Từ Thiện Lương, born 1950
99. Võ Ngọc Cư, born 1951
100. Võ Thành Lê, born 1955
101. Võ Tiết, born 1952

102. Lê Phúc, born 1951
103. Đoàn Văn Cư, born 1962
104. Nguyễn Đình, born 1968
105. Phan Thanh Ý, born 1948
106. Đỗ Thị Hồng, born 1957
107. Trần Phi Dũng, born 1966
108. Lê Đức Động, born 1983
109. Lê Trọng Cư, born 1966
110. Lương Nhật Quang, born 1987
111. Nguyễn Thái Bình, born 1986
112. Trần Quân, born 1984
113. Phan Thanh Tường, born 1987
114. Hồ Đức Hòa, born 1974
115. Nguyễn Đăng Minh Mẫn, born 1985
116. Tráng A Chớ, born 1985
117. Kpuil Mel
118. Kpuil Lẽ
119. Siu Thái (a.k.a Ama Thương), born 1978
120. Phạm Thị Phượng, born 1945
121. Trần Thị Thúy, born 1971
122. Siu Hlom, born 1967
123. Siu Nheo, born 1955
124. Siu Brom, born 1967
125. Rah Lan Mlih, born 1966
126. Rơ Mah Pró, born 1964
127. Rah Lan Blom, born 1976
128. Kpã Sinh, born 1959
129. Rơ Mah Klít, born 1946
130. Nguyễn Hoàng Quốc Hùng, born 1981
131. Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức, born 1966
132. Rmah Hlach (a.k.a Ama Blut), born 1968
133. Siu Koch (a.k.a Ama Liên), born 1985
134. Nhi (a.k.a Bã Tiêm), born 1958
135. Siu Ben (a.k.a Ama Yôn)
136. Rơ Lan Jú (a.k.a Ama Suit)
137. Nơh, born 1959
138. Rôh, born 1962
139. Siu Wiu
140. Y Kur BĐáp