



Regional Office for South-East Asia

PRESS RELEASE

UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE CONCERNED WITH THE CONVICTION OF THREE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN VIET NAM

BANGKOK (29 August 2014) - The UN Human Rights Office for South-East Asia (OHCHR) is concerned that a court in Viet Nam has convicted and imprisoned three human rights defenders for their peaceful human rights work. On 26 August 2014, the Dong Thap Provincial People's Court sentenced Ms. Bui Thi Minh Hang, Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuy Quynh, and Mr. Nguyen Van Minh to between two and three years in prison on charges of "disturbing public order" under Article 245 of the Penal Code.

The regular arrests and harsh convictions of human rights defenders, bloggers and journalists is in contravention of Viet Nam's international obligations to uphold freedom of expression, assembly and association under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. OHCHR has on many past occasions raised concerns with the Government regarding this disturbing trend. In February 2014 the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders also raised such concerns, describing *"a pattern of targeting, intimidating and silencing peaceful pro-democracy activists and human rights defenders who exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression and their right to freedom of association in the country."*

On 11 February 2014, the three human rights defenders were arrested after they organized a group to visit the home of human rights lawyer and former political prisoner Mr. Nguyen Bac Truyen who had been reportedly beaten by police and briefly detained at Chi Hoa Prison. The group was arrested. After two days, 18 of them were released, while the three human rights defenders were held in detention until their conviction this Tuesday. According to information received, the trial was not open and a number of relatives and activists who tried to attend the trial were prevented by police from doing so. Some were put under informal house arrest, while others were intercepted by police while travelling to the court house. There was reportedly a large police presence restricting entry to the court.

Ms. Bui Thi Minh Hang has focused her human rights work on protecting the rights of farmers, particularly in land confiscation cases. Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuy Quynh, and Mr. Nguyen Van Minh are Hoa Hao Buddhist practitioners who campaign on religious freedom issues.

OHCHR urges the Government of Viet Nam, a member of the Human Rights Council, to review the use of the Criminal Code to target human rights defenders and to fully respect rights to freedom of expression, opinion and association in the country.

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The Regional Office for South-East Asia in Bangkok represents the High Commissioner for Human Rights within South East Asia. The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal human rights official of the United Nations. She heads the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which spearheads the United Nations' human rights efforts.

OHCHR website: <http://www.ohchr.org>

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