

VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

2023



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January 30, 2024



Nguyen Van Dai
President
Brotherhood For Democracy

I. Introduction

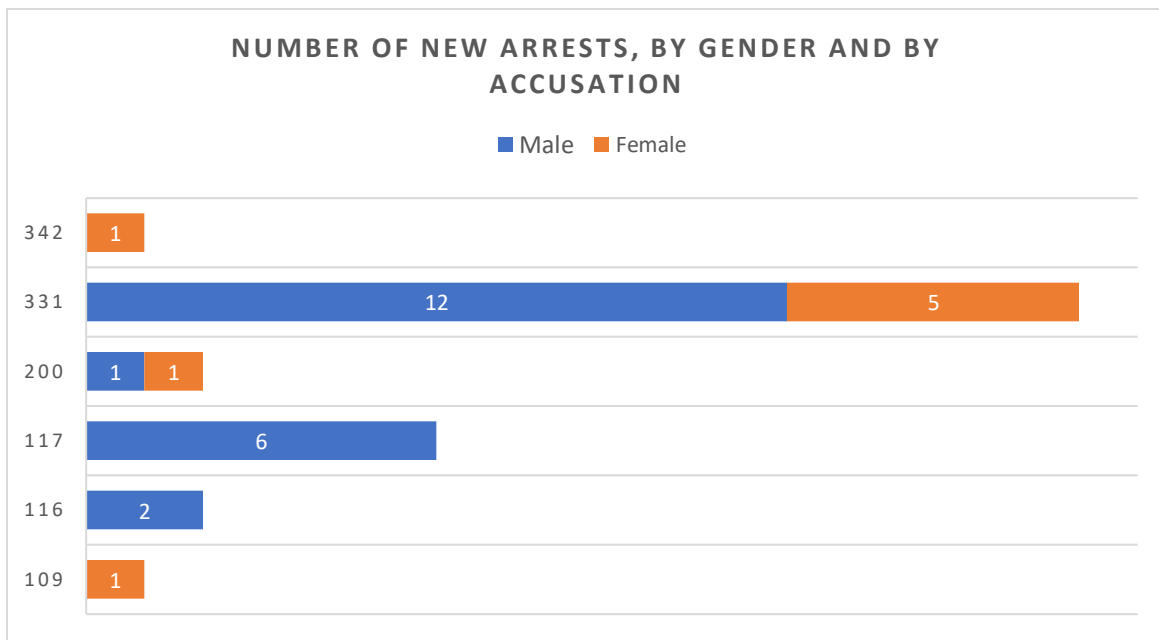
In 2023, Vietnam's return to the United Nations Human Rights Council raised expectations for improvements in its human rights situation, which has often been criticized. Contrary to these hopes, the practical aspect of human rights improvement in the past year has been sporadic and primarily related to macro-level policies. These few bright spots have been overshadowed by widespread and systematic human rights violations by the Vietnamese government.

2023 also marked an expansion of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the direct perpetrator in many serious human rights violations. According to the budget estimates for 2021, 2022, and 2023, the budget allocated to the MPS consistently ranked second, only after the Ministry of National Defense, and was more than ten times that of other essential sectors such as Health and Education. The budget for this ministry is expected to continue increasing in 2024, reaching 113 trillion VND. This increase is attributed to salary payments and social benefits for the law enforcement personnel. In November 2023, the National Assembly passed a law on the Forces Participating in Protecting Security and Order at the Grassroots level, merging and formalizing three forces, including neighborhood protection, specialized communal police, and team leaders and deputies of the people's security teams.

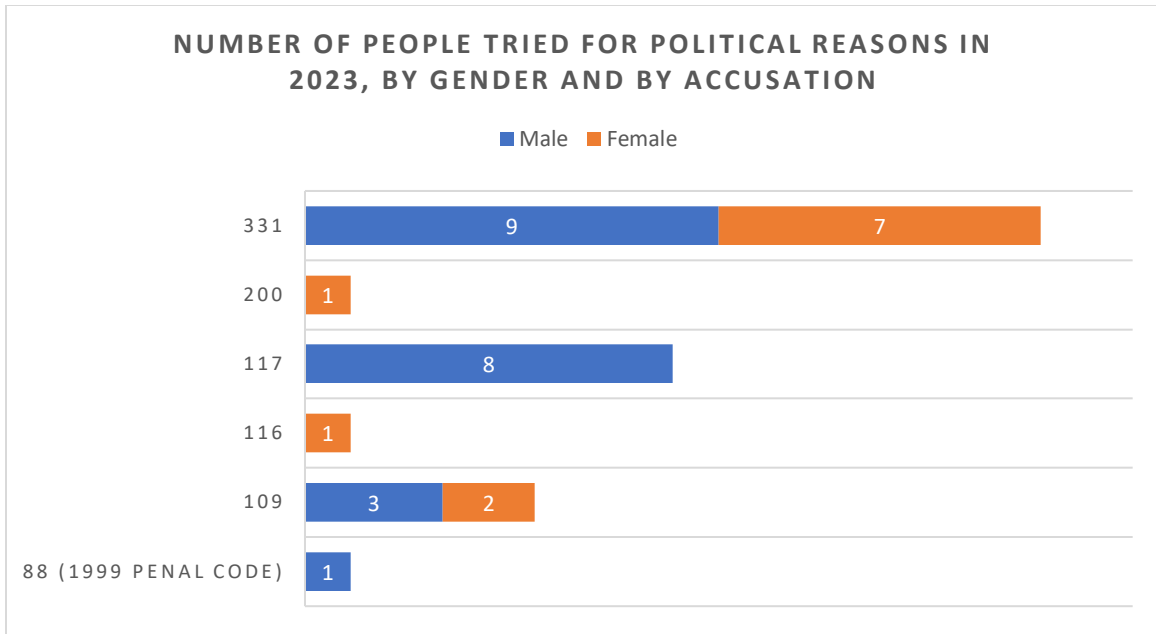
The government persists in suppressing human rights activists and conscience prisoners. Despite not being widely reported in the media, protests by bond investors have been ongoing for the past year in Hanoi. Meanwhile, other provinces have witnessed opposition from the victims of unjust land reclamation for economic development.

Freedom of speech and assembly rights continue to be systematically and widely violated. According to the press, from late December 2022 to the end of 2023, at least 29 individuals were arrested for exercising their rights to freedom of thought and peaceful expression. Most of those detained and prosecuted face charges of "abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state, legitimate interests of individuals, and other organizations" (Article 331 of the Penal Code 2015). Three cases involving registered Non-governmental Organizations' members were arrested on charges of tax evasion (Article 200 of the Penal Code 2015) and misappropriation of documents (Article 342 of the Penal Code 2015). Two cases of ethnic minority activists were arrested and prosecuted for undermining national solidarity policies

(Article 116 of the Penal Code 2015). Seven other cases were arrested on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the government (Article 109 of the Penal Code 2015) and propaganda against the state (Article 117 of the Penal Code 2015). This year also marked the Vietnamese government’s ambition for cross-border human rights repression with an abduction of an asylum-seeking activist in Thailand.



At least 33 individuals were brought to trial and sentenced to imprisonment in 2023, with the majority of verdicts based on charges of abusing democratic freedoms and propaganda against the state (Article 117 of the Penal Code 2015 or Article 88 of the Penal Code 1999). All five cases tried on charges conspiracy to overthrow the government were linked to the Provisional National Government of Vietnam.



In 2023, a shocking event occurred that rocked both the government and public opinion as a Montagnard group attacked government offices in Dak Lak province. While the authorities claimed it was a terrorist attack directed by individuals from abroad, the eruption of this incident cannot be denied as partly stemming from repressive policies and the isolation of indigenous people in the Central Highlands, especially in the realm of religion.

Within the framework of this 2023 human rights report, the drafting group cannot comprehensively cover all human rights violations but focuses on a few areas that we consider most prominent, providing an overview of the human rights situation in Vietnam over the past year. These areas include: the right to life and security of a person; freedom of expression; human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience; freedom of religion; and the right to non-discrimination for ethnic minorities.

This report will list events and human rights violations documented by the drafting group from December 10, 2022, to December 31, 2023. The report is divided into five parts:

Part 1: Introduction to the Vietnam context and a brief overview of the human rights situation.

Part 2: Methodology for preparing the report.

Part 3: Significant good human rights practice.

Part 4: Serious human rights violations listed in groups of issues.

Part 5: Conclusion.

II. Methodology

Enumeration and descriptive methods are used mainly and throughout the report. Data set was built from December 10, 2022 to December 31, 2023. The figures were continuously reviewed and updated until the report got published on January 20, 2024.

The report's appendix contains lists of people arrested and tried for exercising fundamental and inseparable human rights recognised by Vietnam in both domestic and international forums. These lists were compiled based on publicly available information, so they may have overlooked cases that were previously unknown to the public.

The majority of the cases and information mentioned have been thoroughly reported and are easily verifiable through domestic and international press resources. Some information provided by the victim and his or her family was also collected in the report.

Please email any comments, questions, or case inquiries to the drafting team at: information.humanrights@protonmail.com

III. Good human rights practices

In 2023, the Vietnamese government demonstrated some encouraging human rights practices:

At the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, a police lieutenant in Ho Chi Minh City was arrested and investigated for allegations of torture resulting in the death of a person in temporary detention.¹ Information compiled from the press signifies that cases of torture still occur regularly in Vietnam's prison system, and the annual death toll in detention centers has not seen a significant reduction. However, the investigation and prosecution of a police officer for the charge of torture may indicate a willingness to hold perpetrators accountable.

In February, the Ministry of Justice sought opinions on a draft related to the National Action Program to perfect policies and laws to promote responsible business practices to state agencies

¹ <https://www.rfa.org/vietMese/news/vietMnews/lieutenant-policeman-prosecuted-related-to-using-corporal-punishment-with-detainee-to-death-01132023071851.html>

and enterprises (through Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry - VCCI). In December 2022, a seminar on this topic was organized at the UNDP headquarters with the participation of state agencies, experts, and social organizations.

Also in February, Deputy Prime Minister Tran Luu Quang signed Decision No. 87/QD-TTg on February 14, 2023, approving the Plan to enhance the effective implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The purpose of the plan is claimed to continue the effective implementation of the 2013 Constitution, relevant legal provisions, and the National Plan for the implementation of the Convention against Torture.

In November 2023, Vietnam welcomed the first visit from the Special Rapporteur on the right to development. According to the statistics of the OHCHR², from 2010 to the present, 24 Special Procedures have requested visits to Vietnam, but only eight of them have been able to visit the single-party nation in Southeast Asia to understand the realities of their respective areas of responsibility, among which were two visits of Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion and belief.

Overall, Vietnam's positive human rights practices over the past year were concentrated in macro-policy commitments while lacking significant improvements at the grassroots level. The investigation into police torture practices remains problematic and fails to establish effective precedents to protect the rights of those detained. In reality, many allegations of police attacks, torture during detention, coerced confessions, and humiliation have been denied by the state without proper investigation.

IV. Human rights violations

1. Right to Life and Personal Security

1.1. Death Penalty

The Vietnamese government maintains the death penalty for 18 exceptionally serious offenses under the 2015 Penal Code. The annual number of executions is kept secret, which is only revealed in minimal details in sporadic reports of the MPS or Ministry of Justice. According

² <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/ViewCountryVisits.aspx?visitType=all&country=VNM&Lang=en>

to Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Nguyen Hoa Binh,³ from October 2021 to September 2022, courts at the first-instance level nationwide judged over 145,000 defendants, with nearly 120,000 individuals receiving prison sentences or the death penalty. Most of the sentences were related to drug offenses and homicide.

Death row inmates are often held in solitary confinement in prisons and are subjected to leg irons while awaiting execution, contrary to international principles on the treatment of prisoners.

The alarming issue extends beyond the implementation of the death penalty to the lack of transparency in the investigation and trial processes, leading to numerous miscarriages of justice. In recent years, both domestic and international public opinion has raised concerns about death sentences fraught with ambiguities and injustices, such as the cases of Ho Duy Hai, Nguyen Van Chuong, and Le Van Manh. Authorities base these convictions on coerced confessions obtained during investigations while ignoring the objectivity of evidence and the defendants' recantations.

Rarely are these errors rectified; instead, they are concealed by subsequent mistakes. On September 22, 2023, the Vietnamese government abruptly executed Le Van Manh through lethal injection, despite continuous cries of innocence from the condemned and his family over 18 years. Information about the execution was only sent to the family four days prior, through a document signed by the Chief Justice of the Provincial People's Court of Hoa Binh on September 18, 2023.

Also in August, the family of death row inmate Nguyen Van Chuong, who had proclaimed his innocence for 16 years, unexpectedly received a notice of execution from the court. Numerous human rights organizations, representatives of foreign governments, and the UN Special Rapporteur voiced objections and demanded an immediate stay of execution for Chuong. To date, Chuong has not been executed.

The cases of these two death row inmates, particularly Le Van Manh, intensify the uncertainty and fear for those still proclaiming their innocence and their families. Moreover, these incidents highlight the arbitrariness in law enforcement, lack of transparency, and fairness in the

³ <https://danviet.vn/toa-so-tham-tren-ca-nuoc-phat-tu-gan-120000-nguoi-trong-mot-M-20221108112043139.htm>

investigation and trial processes in Vietnam, resulting in irreversible outcomes like the death of a person who maintained their innocence until the final moments.

1.2. Deaths in Temporary Detention Centers

Despite commitments to combat torture, the issue of torture of detainees persists within the police force. In 2023, according to media reports, at least 5 cases of individuals dying in police custody during investigations were documented:

- On May 25, 2023, at the police station in Bu Dang district, Binh Phuoc province, 27-year-old Mr. Nguyen Tan Duong died unexpectedly while being detained for investigation into a theft case. The victim's family discovered multiple bruises on his body.

- On May 31, 2023, at the police station in Muong Lan commune, Soc Cop district, Son La province, Ms. Th.Th.A., an H'mong person residing in Kha village, was found dead in a hanging position. Ms. A. was arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking.

- On August 17, 2023, in Hai Phong City, Tran Duc Trinh was rushed to the hospital after 2 days of detention for investigation into a theft case. The police claimed that Mr. Trinh had a minor stroke while in custody. The family stated that Mr. Trinh was in good health two days prior, and upon admission to the hospital, he was in a coma with injuries to his face and three broken ribs.

- On August 19, 2023, at the police station in Ha Giang City, Ha Giang province, 44-year-old Mr. Nguyen Van Hung died suddenly. Mr. Hung had been arrested by the police a day earlier due to a dispute over a debt with another person. The police stated that Mr. Hung committed suicide by tying his feet, hands, and drowning himself in a water tank.

- On September 3, 2023, at the police station in Duc Linh district, Binh Thuan province, 28-year-old Mr. Bui Van Hai was found dead in less than a day of detention. The victim's family reported numerous signs of torture on Mr. Hai's body.

- On September 21, 2023, at the temporary holding facility of the police in Tien Phuoc district, Quang M province, Mr. Nguyen Minh Su was found hanging. The family provided images showing multiple wounds on the victim's body and head. Mr. Su had been arrested on September 19, 2023, on charges related to drug trafficking, and he passed away at the hospital on September 22, 2023.



*Pictures of Mr. Su's wounds posted on social media by his family
(source: Người Lao động online magazine)*

Most of the cases mentioned above have been explained by the police as resulting from the victims' poor health or suicide, despite photographic evidence of injuries on the bodies. In these incidents, the families of the victims mostly accept the police's explanations due to the power imbalance between law enforcement agencies and individuals. Some families, determining to seek the truth and justice for their loved ones, have to face interference and oppression from the police. A notable example is the case of Mr. Dao Ba Cuong, the father of Dao Ba Phi, who died in hanging position in a police station in Tuy Hoa City, Phu Yen Province in October 2022. From December 2022 to April 2023, Mr. Dao Ba Cuong sent multiple petitions to relevant authorities, requesting clarification on certain aspects related to his son's death and asking for the return of the body. On April 27, Mr. Cuong was arrested on charges of "Abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, the rights, and legitimate interests of individuals" (Article 331 of the Vietnamese Penal Code). Mr. Cuong was subsequently sentenced to 2 years in prison in a court session at the end of 2023.



Mr. Dao ba Cuong at the Court of Phu Yen Province on December 12, 2023 (source: Police Online Newspaper)

2. Freedom of Speech

2.1. Media and Press Policies

In the early months of 2023, the Vietnamese government took various actions to tighten control over the press and media:

On February 28th, the Central Committee issued Regulations on the responsibilities, powers, appointment, dismissal, commendation, and discipline of leadership in press agencies. The new regulations clearly institutionalized the role of the Party in controlling the media: the central directing body for press at the national level is the Central Propaganda Committee; at the local level, it is the provincial/municipal propaganda committee. Those appointed to lead press agencies must be members of the Communist Party of Vietnam, with a high level of political theoretical competence (not mandatory for press agencies affiliated with religious organizations).

Decision No. 512/QĐ-BTTTT on March 31, 2023, from the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC), regarding the management of Internet services, compels Internet service companies to provide information about Internet users to the government without the need for a court order. Companies must establish branches or representative offices in Vietnam and remove problematic content within 24 hours upon request from the MIC or the Ministry of Public Security (MPS).

In May 2023, the MIC also announced its collaboration with the MPS to draft a decree requiring all social media accounts, including those on foreign platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Youtube, to disclose their identities.

In June 2023, Vietnam's authorities requested social media platforms to use artificial intelligence models to automate the detection and removal of politically sensitive online content.

Under legal pressure, foreign companies have complied more closely with the Vietnamese government in removing conflicting information. According to the MIC's report for the first six months of 2023, the efforts to prevent and remove malicious information on the internet achieved the highest rate to date. Facebook removed 2,549 posts, disabled 12 accounts, and took down 54 advertising pages; YouTube removed 6,101 videos and 7 channels; TikTok removed 415 links and 149 violating accounts.⁴ Moreover, social media platforms originating outside Vietnamese territory were also regulated through agreements between the Vietnamese government and these communication service providers. For instance, on July 7, 2023, the YouTube channel of human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai, who is currently in political exile in Germany, was blocked under pressure from the Vietnamese government.

2.2. Criminalization of Freedom of Speech

The freedom of expression of the Vietnamese people is consistently restricted in various legal documents with vague and unclear language. Although the Vietnamese Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to protest and express their opinions, in reality, this right is almost revoked when any assembly of five people or more must be registered and approved by the relevant state authority (Government Decree 38/2005 and Circular No. 09/2005/TT-BCA of the

⁴ <https://vietMnet.vn/6-thang-dau-M-go-bo-hang-nghin-thong-tin-xau-doc-tren-facebook-youtube-2160057.html>

Ministry of Public Security). Due to this prohibition, the rare space for people to express their thoughts is the online environment. However, this space is tightly monitored and significantly narrowed by various legal regulations. Among these, the Criminal Code and the Cybersecurity Law are most frequently cited to suppress and arrest individuals with dissenting views against the Communist Party's perspective.

In 2023, several social media account owners were summoned and prosecuted by the police for reflecting and sharing negative information about the government:

- On May 19, 2023, Ms. Nguyen Thi Vinh and Ms. Nguyen Thi Huong, residing in Yen Ninh hamlet, Nenh Town, Bac Giang province, were prosecuted and prohibited from leaving their homes on charges of "disturbing public order." These citizens, along with others, went to the gate of the Bac Giang provincial police headquarters in Tan Tien commune, Bac Giang city, on February 2, 2023, to request a meeting with the Director of the provincial police. The police accused Ms. Vinh and Ms. Huong of engaging in acts that disrupted security and order at the police agency's gate, constituting the crime of "Disturbing public order" as stipulated in Article 318(1) of the Criminal Code.

- Regarding the attack in Dak Lak on June 11, 2023, the police in Dak Lak province stated that they had handled over 100 cases of posting malicious information related to the incident from June 12, 2023, to June 17, 2023. Nationwide, at least five people were administratively fined between 5.5 million and 7.5 million VND according to the provisions of Government Decree 15/2020/ND-CP dated February 3, 2020. The government's decree stipulates administrative penalties for violations in the fields of postal services, radio frequencies, information technology, and electronic transactions, because of comments or shared content deemed as "distorted." One of the cases fined involved expressing the viewpoint that the attack by ethnic minorities on state agencies was due to unjust land confiscation and compensation policies. However, the government did not impose fines or object to posts or videos that disseminated misinformation aimed at framing the ethnic minority community after the incident.

3. Human Rights Activists

3.1. Suppression of Dissidents within the Country

In 2023, the Vietnamese government continued to intensify the repression of dissenting voices through arrests and trials of opposition figures. Some notable cases include:

- On February 22, 2023, former prisoner of conscience Le Minh The was arrested on charges of violating Article 331 of the Penal Code of 2025 after sharing posts exposing discrimination and human rights violations within Vietnam's prison system. The trial took place on December 6, 2023, and he was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of imprisonment.

- On April 12, 2023, the People's Court of Hanoi sentenced activist Nguyen Lan Thang to six years in prison and two years of probation on charges of violating Article 117 of the 2015 Penal Code.

- On May 25, 2023, the People's Court of Da Nang sentenced Bui Tuan Lam to 5 years and 6 months in prison and 4 years of probation for violating Article 117 of the 2015 Penal Code.

- On June 6, 2023, the People's Court of Dak Lak province sentenced music teacher Dang Dang Phuoc to 8 years in prison and 4 years of probation on charges of violating Article 117 of the Penal Code of 2015.

- On July 5, 2023, Phan Tat Thanh was arrested on charges of spreading anti-state propaganda. Thanh was the administrator of "Nhat Ky Yeu Nuoc" (Diary of Patriotism), a popular pro-democracy page on Facebook with thousands of followers.

- On September 15, 2023, the Thong Nhat District Court in Dong Nai province sentenced Hoang Khuong to 6 years and 6 months in prison for violating Article 331 of the Vietnamese Penal Code.

- On September 29, 2023, Tran Duc Thang was arrested on charges of abusing democratic freedoms (Article 331 of the Penal Code). Thang was accused of using his personal social media account from April 2021 to June 2021 to post, share, and comment on content deemed to distort the party's policies and insult the reputation of organizations and individuals.

- On December 29, 2023, former member of CHTV, Phan Van Bach, was arbitrarily arrested. The temporary detention order was only delivered to his family after repeated requests for clarification from the city police.⁵

Many activists arrested and tried over the past year were individuals who had not openly expressed pro-democracy views for several years. The charges brought by the police often relied on activities from years before. For example, Phan Van Bach, a former member of the independent YouTube channel CHTV reporting on social injustices and prominent national issues, was actively involved in pro-democracy and human rights activities. However, after he announced his departure from CHTV in 2018, focusing more on economic activities, he seldom publicly expressed political views as before.

Some activists reported an increase in police summons over the past year. Facebooker Le Xuan Dieu mentioned being forcibly taken to the security agency headquarters in Ho Chi Minh City on July 31, 2023. He was interrogated and physically assaulted throughout the day, only returning home late in the evening. During the questioning about his Facebook posts on July 31, every 30 minutes, 7-8 police officers would enter to assault him. Medical examinations and X-rays revealed multiple soft tissue injuries and a fractured fourth rib. On August 1, 2023, Dieu was again summoned for work, both in the morning and afternoon, with similar content.

⁵ <https://www.rfa.org/vietMese/news/vietMnews/hanoi-police-announce-detention-period-of-activist-phan-van-bach-01032024053622.html>



Mr. Le Xuan Dieu with bruises on his face after the meeting with the police on July 31 and August 1, 2023

In addition to the arrests and convictions of political dissidents, the Vietnamese government employs various forms of harassment, such as:

- Personal Activity Monitoring: Many activists and their families have reported being monitored and surveilled in their daily activities and on social media. The government has increased surveillance and hindered the movement of dissidents during major political or diplomatic events. In 2023, some activists reported being closely followed by security forces for several days, even when there were no significant political or diplomatic events. This constant surveillance has a negative psychological impact, causing anxiety for activists and their families.

- Obstruction in Administrative Procedures and Daily Life: Activists have reported facing difficulties in completing administrative procedures at local government offices, such as not having personal documents, legal records, passports, or ID cards confirmed. Some harassment methods affect the lives of activists, with the police often pressuring landlords and companies to make activists lose their jobs or places of residence. In 2023, at least two activists and one family member of a land rights activist reported being pressured by local police, forcing them to leave

their rented accommodations abruptly. An example is the case of Ms. Nguyen Thi Anh Tuyet, the fiancée of democratic activist Do Nam Trung. Ms. Tuyet's family was rejected by three landlords within a month, despite them previously accepting deposits and agreeing to a long-term rental. These landlords changed their minds and demanded the entire family leave the rented house immediately, just a few days after Ms. Tuyet started moving in.

- Forced into Mental Hospitals: Activists Le Anh Hung, Trinh Ba Phuong, Pham Chi Thanh, and Nguyen Thuy Hanh have been forcibly admitted to mental hospitals while in temporary detention. Most families assert that these prisoners of conscience had normal mental and psychological health before their arrest. Some detainees managed to communicate with their families, reporting physical abuse, forced consumption, or injection of drugs causing confusion. Despite these circumstances, the activists were still tried and sentenced to severe imprisonment. An example is the case of citizen journalist Le Anh Hung, released on July 5, 2023. Mr. Hung was arrested in July 2018 and forcibly treated at a mental hospital from May 2019 to May 2022. Despite nearly four years of forced treatment without any trial, the government still held a trial on August 30, 2022, and sentenced him to 5 years in prison for exploiting democratic freedoms.

These forms of harassment contribute to creating an environment of fear, isolation, and psychological distress for activists and their families in Vietnam.

3.2. Suppression of Human Rights Lawyers

In March 2023, the Long An province police summoned five lawyers who were defending the case related to the Tinh That Bong Lai pagoda for questioning. The police accused the legal team of disseminating videos, images, statements, and articles with signs of criminal activity under Article 331 of the Penal Code of 2015 during their defense in the Tinh That Bong Lai case. The police's allegations were linked to the lawyers' use of the YouTube channel "Lawyer's Diary" to share information about the case, including analyzing actions that violated judicial activities and seriously violated criminal procedure regulations by the Long An provincial prosecution authorities. Lawyers Dang Dinh Manh, Nguyen Van Mieng, and Dao Kim Lan refused to appear as summoned, citing the irrationality of the investigative agency. In response, in June 2023, the Long An province police issued a wanted notice for these three lawyers. Faced with the lack of

transparency and rationale in the police's pursuits, the three lawyers had to choose the path of seeking asylum abroad.

Two lawyers in the group, Dang Dinh Manh and Nguyen Van Mieng, were well-known for handling numerous politically and religiously sensitive cases, including the Dong Tam incident in 2020. These lawyers frequently represented the families of conscience prisoners, advocating for their rights when they faced legal troubles. Due to their direct involvement in representing citizens in conflicts with the government, these lawyers had been subjected to harassment, threats, and attacks multiple times.



Lawyers in Tinh That Bong Lai Case (Source: Manh Dang's Facebook)

The practical situation in Vietnam demonstrates that lawyers find it challenging to play a clear role in defending human rights due to government oppression. Lawyers defending victims of injustice or individuals with dissenting opinions often face harassments, such as imprisonment, as seen in cases like Lawyer Le Thi Cong Nhan, Lawyer Nguyen Van Dai, and Lawyer Le Quoc Quan. Some lawyers have their professional licenses revoked, as in the case of Lawyer Vo An Don, or experience physical assaults, as with Lawyer Tran Thu Nam and Lawyer Le Van Luan. Given the precedent set by the Long An provincial police, the role of lawyers in political cases is likely to diminish further, and lawyers may be forced to consider seeking asylum for legally protecting their clients.

3.3. Escalation of Repression against Civil Society

The Vietnamese government exercises control and limits the establishment of civil society organizations through legal regulations and procedures for formation, sponsorship, and operations. NGOs must obtain approval from the central government before organizing events sponsored or involving foreign participation. Even in normal activities, non-governmental organizations are informally monitored and questioned by the Ministry of Public Security. To organize cultural events, conferences, or seminars, organizations need an Event Organization Permit issued by the relevant authorities, based on legal documents such as Decree 103/2009/ND-CP, Decree 01/2012/ND-CP, Decree 79/2012/ND-CP, and Decision 76/2010/QD-TTg. Events with foreign involvement require permits from relevant ministries. Especially, events covering national security, defense, politics, border territories, religion, and human rights must have the Prime Minister's approval.

This approach has successfully prevented the formation and growth of many civil society organizations with opened and independent ideologies. Consequently, civil society organizations in Vietnam can be categorized into "underground" groups (indicating unlicensed organizations) and mainstream/registered NGOs (authorized by the government). Unlike unrecognized organizations, these mainstream NGOs are considered to operate in a relatively safe zone within civil society. While they may face surveillance, regular interrogations, and pressure from the police, no prominent NGO has been abruptly halted or shut down within the past three years.

This trend persists in 2023, with the police arresting three intellectuals:

- Hoang Ngoc Giao: The director of the Institute for Policy, Law, and Development (LPD) and a critic of policies, was arrested on December 16, 2022, on tax evasion charges. Before his arrest, Giao was known for his critical opinions and efforts to reform land policies. In 2020, he demanded the establishment of an independent commission to investigate the raid by the police in Dong Tam commune, leading to the death of Le Dinh Kinh and three police officers.

- Hoang Thi Minh Hong: An environmental activist, was arrested on May 31, 2023. Hong faced tax evasion charges amounting to 6.7 billion VND and was sentenced to three years in prison on September 28, 2023. Her organization CHANGE, founded by Hong, had to announce its cessation of activities in 2022 after ten years of environmental projects and policy advocacy.

- Ngo Thi To Nhiem: The CEO of Vietnam Initiative for Energy Transition (VIETSE), a consultancy focused on green energy policies, was arrested on September 15, accused of misappropriating documents from the organization. She was alleged to have received documents related to the operations of Vietnam Electricity's 500kV and 200kV power grid, which authorities claimed were classified. At the time of her detention, Nhiem was collaborating with the Vietnam office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to implement the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), a \$15.5 billion commitment from the G-7 and other nations to help Vietnam reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.

Over the past three years, the targeted arrests of leaders of registered NGOs have primarily focused on individuals with expertise in environmental issues and labor rights advocacy—two pillars within the sustainability objectives of new-generation trade agreements. However, individuals with previous criminal convictions lose the opportunity to participate in independent monitoring mechanisms, such as the Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) under the European Union-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). According to Decision No. 1972/QĐ-BCT issued by the Ministry of Industry and Trade on the establishment of the Domestic Advisory Group Vietnam (DAG Vietnam), organizations with a history of legal violations are ineligible for DAG Vietnam membership. Therefore, the arrests and imprisonment of these activists make it challenging for them to maintain independence within civil society, particularly in monitoring trade agreements.

The recent wave of arrests and forced dissolution of mainstream NGOs in Vietnam sets an unprecedented precedent. This success has instilled caution among the remaining civil society entities. Numerous sources suggest that Vietnamese NGOs are now more hesitant in drafting and submitting reports to international human rights mechanisms. These organizations are also increasingly reluctant to undertake projects or accept funding from international entities, including the United Nations or foreign governments, due to concerns about violating complex tax regulations associated with international funding.

This chilling effect on civil society indicates a heightened level of apprehension within the sector, fueled by the unprecedented crackdown and the fear of further legal and operational restrictions. The tightening grip on NGOs has effectively created an atmosphere of self-censorship

and reluctance to engage with international mechanisms, limiting the ability of civil society to effectively advocate for human rights and environmental issues.

3.4. Cross-Border Repression

In 2023, the Vietnamese government demonstrated an unprecedented ability and ambition to control dissent across borders. While previously the government could only arrest and imprison dissidents within Vietnamese territory and limit the influence of activists abroad on cyberspace, this year witnessed an extension of state control over transnational ideological spaces.

On April 13, 2023, prominent dissident blogger Duong Van Thai suddenly disappeared on the streets of Thailand. Three days later, the police in Ha Tinh province announced that Thai had "illegally infiltrated Vietnam" through a border crossing and was temporarily detained for investigation. By mid-July 2023, the Ministry of Public Security issued a statement about the arrest and detention of YouTuber Duong Van Thai, charging him with "spreading anti-state propaganda" under Article 117 of the Penal Code. Since April, Thai's family has not been allowed to visit or call him. Besides the one-way information from the Ministry of Public Security, it is impossible to verify Duong Van Thai's health status while detained in Vietnam's prison system.



One of the last photos of Duong Van Thai before going missing on April 13, 2023

(source: BBCVietnamese)

Blogger Duong Van Thai is a well-known dissident on social media and a citizen journalist who has provided extensive information and in-depth analyses about the political landscape in Vietnam. Due to oppression in Vietnam, Thai had to flee to Thailand in 2019 and was granted refugee status by the UNHCR in July 2020.

Before the case of Duong Van Thai, Vietnam had a precedent of abducting Vietnamese individuals from the territory of another country:

- In 2007, Vietnam executed the abduction of a Khmer Krom monk, Venerable Tim Sakhorn, from Cambodia to imprison him in Vietnam.

- In 2017, Vietnam conducted the abduction of Trinh Xuan Thanh, an individual accused of serious corruption in Vietnam, from Germany.

- In 2019, Vietnam carried out the abduction of dissident journalist Truong Duy Nhat from Thailand to Vietnam.

The actions of the Vietnamese government constitute a serious violation of international conventions and laws, posing a direct threat to the lives and health of Vietnamese individuals residing in other countries. These abductions were executed covertly and with little direct evidence showing the direct involvement of the Vietnamese government, except for the ultimate consequences where those individuals appeared in Vietnamese courts as serious criminal defendants. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese government has faced relatively few international sanctions, leading to a recurrence of similar incidents.

4. Prisoners of Conscience

The prison and detention system in Vietnam lacks independent monitoring mechanisms for the conditions of prisoners or investigation of torture and discrimination complaints. Consequently, prisoners, especially political prisoners, are often subjected to oppression and revenge through various forms of mistreatment while in custody.

4.1. Torture in Prison

Torture occurs quite regularly within the prison system, both during pretrial detention and the execution of sentences:

- On March 28, 2023, activist Truong Van Dung accused that he was beaten while detained at Hoa Lo prison during the trial in Hanoi People's Court and was taken to the hospital several times within 15 days.

- On July 5, 2023, Phan Tat Thanh, an administrator of the "Diary of Patriotism" page, was arbitrarily arrested and tortured for information by the authorities. Not only was this activist tortured, but the police also summoned his mother and younger brother for interrogation. Here, Thanh's mother, over 70 years old, was beaten by at least two police officers until she vomited blood and fainted on the spot. Thanh's younger brother was beaten and electrically shocked by a group of police officers in turns.

- On September 5, 2023, political prisoner Dang Dinh Bach informed his family that he had been assaulted in the detention facility. Bach was hit on the back of the head, causing bruising and prolonged headaches. He revealed that he and three other political prisoners (Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, Nguyen Trong Bang, and Nguyen Thanh Quang) were threatened with a knife by a group of inmates because they submitted a petition requesting the public disclosure of the prison's food ration standards.

Given the harsh living conditions coupled with torture, many prisoners of conscience have died in detention. Pastor Dinh Diem, who was serving a 16-year sentence for "activities aiming to overthrow the government" at Prison No. 6 in Nghe An province, passed away on January 4, 2023. Diem's family raised suspicions about his sudden death as his recent health had improved, and his body showed multiple bruises on the neck and ankles, with a wound in the mouth.⁶

4.2. Harsh Living Conditions

All prisoners are obligated to engage in strenuous work throughout the day without enjoying the benefits of their labor. The tasks that prisoners are compelled to do are often strenuous, hazardous, or involve exposure to harmful substances, such as breaking stones, casting bricks, carpentry, or making joss paper. However, prisoners are not provided with suitable clothing or protective measures during their work, leading to health consequences.

⁶ <https://www.rfa.org/vietMese/news/vietMnews/family-of-prisoner-of-conscience-at-prison-camp-6-questions-his-death-01062023103939.html>

Furthermore, despite the demanding labor, prisoners must endure extremely poor conditions in all aspects, including living conditions, food, hygiene, and healthcare. Many former prisoners have reported being confined in cramped, overcrowded cells, sweltering heat in the summer, and extreme cold in the winter. Some detention facilities even mistreat prisoners by dismantling fans during scorching summer months. The food supplied does not meet the prescribed standards and lacks hygiene; water is often contaminated. In some prisons near construction sites, inmates are exposed to noise pollution and air pollution. The majority of prisoners suffer from skin and joint diseases due to the harsh living conditions. Meanwhile, many prisons do not allow prisoners to undergo comprehensive medical examinations, exacerbating their health conditions.

Dang Thi Hue, an anti-BOT activist serving a 39-month sentence at Prison No. 5 in Thanh Hoa province, shared her experience of suffering from joint pain and thyroid nodules after completing her sentence on January 16, 2023. Hue mentioned that during her time in prison, she and fellow inmates were confined in tight cells, with only 60 cm of space for lying down and daily activities, leading to nerve damage in the legs. Huynh Thi To Nga, a former political prisoner released from B5 prison in Dong Nai province in March 2023, shared a similar experience. Nga stated that her cells were cramped, dark, and poorly ventilated, resulting in decreased eyesight and skin inflammation.

Such harsh living conditions make previously healthy individuals become frail, while those with pre-existing conditions deteriorate further. A notable case is Vu Quang Thuan, currently being held at Nam Ha prison in Ha Nam province. According to information from Thuan's family, he has suffered numerous illnesses since his arrest, with the most severe being gastric bleeding in July 2023. Additionally, Thuan has chronic conditions such as asthma, sinusitis, and lung congestion. According to a former inmate Nguyen Viet Dung, who served in the same prison, Thuan had been disciplined and held separately for over a year. By May 2022, when Thuan returned to the common area for political prisoners, he exhibited severe health decline, and his weight was only 38kg. Thuan's health condition is alarming, and his family's requests for him to receive medical treatment at a hospital have been consistently denied.

In addition to living conditions below standards, prisoners are deprived of other fundamental rights stipulated by the law. On April 5, 2023, prisoner of conscience Le Dinh Luong, serving a 20-year sentence at Nam Ha prison, informed his family that the prison authorities restricted the practice of religious freedom by limiting access to the Bible. The prison also denied Le Dinh Luong access to pens, hindering him from writing complaints about the mistreatment at the facility. Former prisoner of conscience Nguyen Viet Dung also shared on his personal Facebook page that the guards at M Ha prison in Ha Nam province obstructed prisoners' right to education by refusing to provide pens and confiscating and destroying the notebooks prisoners wrote.

5. Freedom of Religion

5.1. Religious Policies

On March 9, 2023, the Vietnamese government announced the White Paper on Religion and Religious Policies, describing it as a declaration of the government's commitment to ensuring religious freedom in Vietnam. The government claimed its efforts to improve the legal framework on beliefs and religion. Earlier, in December 2022, the U.S. Department of State had placed Vietnam on the Special Watch List for violations of religious freedom. The Vietnamese government promptly condemned this action, asserting that the evaluation was not objective and based on inaccurate information.

The Vietnamese government restricts religious practices through legal regulations governing registration and activities. The Law on Beliefs and Religions of 2016 requires religious groups to undergo a multi-step registration and approval process to maintain an unbalanced relationship between authorities and religious organizations. Firstly, a religious organization must obtain government recognition to operate legally (Article 2.12 and Chapter V, Section 1). Secondly, all religious activities must be registered, which essentially means seeking permission, and this permission can be denied (Chapter IV). Thirdly, the government retains the authority to intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups, particularly in the selection, ordination, and appointment of clergy (Chapter V, Sections 2 and 3). These regulations contradict universal human rights standards outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Vietnam has committed to

respecting and implementing. As a result, the government manipulates legal provisions to recognize only 43 organizations representing 16 religions, turning long-established and significant religious groups like the Unified Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, the Original Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect, and the Cao Đài Giáo Chon Truyền (a sect of Caodaism) into organizations operating outside the legal framework.

On November 24, 2023, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued Resolution No. 43 on implementing policies for national unity, recognizing the significant role of religion in realizing national unity policies. Accordingly, the state will utilize religious entities by gathering loyal religious officials and recommending their participation in "patriotic emulation movements" initiated by the Fatherland Front and local authorities. Religious officials will be expected to contribute to "tasks related to the development of the local economy, social affairs, national defense, security, and foreign relations of the locality and the country." The state will "ensure that religious organizations operate in accordance with the law and the constitution." The resolution emphasizes that the government will "respect and encourage the promotion of cultural and ethical values and resources of religions for the cause of building and protecting the country."

The policies related to religion in this resolution once again affirm that religious organizations will not be allowed to operate independently. For the Vietnamese government, religion is not a human right but a political tool to control the population, especially ethnic minorities. Religious organizations must be loyal to the state and assist the government in controlling the thoughts of the people and implementing unity policies.

5.2. Suppression of Small Religions in the Northern Mountainous Region

The campaign to suppress the Dương Văn Minh religion in the northern mountainous provinces continued in 2023. On March 28, 2023, the Cao Bang Provincial Party Committee announced the "successful mobilization" of 562 people to renounce the Dương Văn Minh religion in the second round of the government's struggle. The provincial government of Cao Bang set a target to have all residents in the province abandon the Dương Văn Minh religion by 2024. To achieve this goal, on April 12, 2023, a group of about 15 officials from Nam Quang commune, Bao Lam district, Cao Bang province, went from village to village to force people to sign commitment papers renouncing the religion. This was done by restraining hands, applying red ink

to the fingertip, and pressing the marked finger onto the commitment document. When questioned, an additional 60 district police officers arrived to assist the commune officials in pressuring people to sign the commitment papers. Dương Văn Minh founded the religion around 1989 with the goal of combining Christian doctrines with Hmong ethnic customs to adapt the practices and activities of this community to modern life. The government labeled this religion as superstition, and Dương Văn Minh was accused of exploiting religion to oppose the government and incite dissent within the Hmong community.



An altar in a household following the Dương Văn Minh religion (left) and after being raided by the police in 2022 (Source: RFA)

Not only focusing on the Dương Văn Minh faith, the government also aimed to eliminate several small and emerging religions.

The “San Su Khe To” Sect (also known as the Threefold Cord Christian faith) was introduced to Ha Giang province in Northern Vietnam by a Chinese individual in 1997. In the first ten months of 2023, the district government of Meo Vac organized two peak propaganda sessions encouraging people to abandon the “San su khe to” Sect and return to traditional customs. A total of 125 households, comprising 629 individuals, were deemed to have "voluntarily renounced the religion." On November 22, 2023, the provincial police of Ha Giang announced the complete eradication of this sect from Xin Cai and Khau Vai communes, Meo Vac district. Project No. 23

dated November 23, 2018, from the Ha Giang Provincial Party Committee on "prevention, struggle, and resolution of the activities of cults and strange religions in the province for the 2018 – 2025 period" set a goal to launch a third crackdown at the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024.

Hội Thánh Chúa Thương Chúng Ta (the "Our Beloved God Church") is a religious group following Christianity, founded by Vu Thi Do and introduced to Vietnam in 2017. However, the Vietnamese government regards it as a heretical religion and is determined to eradicate it. According to a report by Chang A Pao, the head of a group for the church's meeting point in Pa Kha village, Ta Tong commune, Muong Te district, Lai Chau, on August 27, 2023, a local delegation comprising provincial, district, and commune police, along with civil officials, went to his residence to force the believers to leave the meeting point. Another meeting point in Pa Kha village was also prohibited from religious activities on August 27, 2023, leading to clashes between the police and believers, with some sustaining superficial injuries and one person being seriously injured and requiring hospitalization.

5.3. Suppression of Independent Evangelical Churches in the Central Highlands

On February 22, 2023, the authorities and police in Dak Lak province obstructed a meeting between representatives of the U.S. Consulate General and some preachers of the Central Highlands Evangelical Church of Christ, an unrecognized Protestant sect by the Vietnamese government. Video clips and images of the incident showed government officials and police in plainclothes blocking entry, preventing any form of communication between the diplomatic delegation and the followers of the faith. The pastors stated that the location of the meeting had been under prior surveillance by the police, with some believers being stationed at the doors and threatened not to leave on that day. The U.S. delegation was unable to proceed with the meeting and had to leave.



US delegation blocked at the house of Mr. Y Cung Nie on February 22, 2023. (Source: Montagnard People for Justice)

Following the incident, some believers of the Central Highlands Evangelical Church of Christ were arrested. Preacher Y Krec Bya, one of the organizers of the meeting, was arrested on April 8, 2023, on charges of undermining national solidarity (Article 116 of the 2015 Penal Code). Y Krec Bya is an advocate for religious freedom in Dak Lak province, where he has collected information and drafted reports advocating for the rightful religious activities in the Central Highlands. Another preacher, Nay Y Blang, was arrested by the provincial police of Phu Yen on May 18, 2023, on charges of violating Article 331 of the 2015 Penal Code. In September 2022, Nay Y Blang had been detained by the police when attempting to meet with representatives of the U.S. diplomatic delegation in Vietnam to report on violations of religious freedom.

Local authorities in the Central Highlands frequently harass and detain members of independent Evangelical churches in these provinces. On June 1, 2023, preacher Y Broc Bya was arrested while on his way to work on the farm with his wife. Preacher Y Bhuar Bdap and believer

Y Gruih Nie were detained by the police while on their way to a prayer gathering. These three individuals are members of two different independent Evangelical churches in Cu Kuin district, Dak Lak province. On November 15, 2023, the provincial authorities of Dak Lak prevented believers of the Central Highlands Evangelical Church of Christ from gathering for prayer at the home of Mrs. H Ik Kbuor in Ea Bar commune, Buon Don district. By November 17, 2023, the authorities had summoned some believers for interrogation and coerced them to sign commitments restricting their religious activities.

Similar to the Central Highlands Evangelical Church of Christ, many independent Evangelical home churches have repeatedly submitted requests to local authorities for guidance on registration but have received no response. It is even worse when local authorities exploit these requests to gather information and harass believers. For instance, in May 2023, a home-based Evangelical group in Cu Mgar district, Dak Lak province, wrote an invitation to the local authorities and the President of Vietnam Vo Van Thuong to participate in religious activities in June. The group did not receive a response to their invitation. After several months, the commune authorities of Cu Sue sent an invitation letter for a meeting to "guide the procedures for establishing religious activity points" on October 31 to the believers. However, when the Evangelical group arrived at the commune's people's committee, they were detained by the police and taken to the headquarters of the district police in Cu Mgar. The group was released after 5 days of arbitrary detention for investigation.⁷

In the Central Highlands region, local authorities ban independent Evangelical churches due to concerns about security issues and allege anti-state propaganda during religious gatherings. In recent years, the government has been resolute in eradicating these churches. More worrisome, after the gunfire incident at two communal police stations in Dak Lak province in June 2023, the communication channel of the MPS, An Ninh TV, accused the Central Highlands Evangelical Church of Christ of being a subversive organization, citing this as a reason to eliminate the religious organization.⁸

⁷ <https://www.voatiengviet.com/a/cong-an-viet-M-cau-luu-bon-tin-do-tin-lanh-doc-lap-o-tay-nguyen/7346660.html>

⁸ ANTV (video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NP03Tb9vNtE>

5.4. Suppressing the Development of Recognized Religious Organizations

At the end of 2022, media reported that a H'mong woman had to flee to Thailand after being coerced by local authorities to renounce her religious beliefs. Lau Y Tong, a mildly disabled woman from the H'mong ethnic group in Ky Son district, Nghe An province, began following the Evangelical faith around 2020 after encountering its teachings online. Tong's religious belief was discovered by neighbors who reported it to the local authorities. The local government immediately took various measures to force Tong to renounce her faith, including persuasive meetings, threats, spreading negative propaganda, and framing her adherence to the Evangelical faith as a violation of the law. Tong was isolated in her community, physically attacked, and faced life-threatening threats, compelling her to seek asylum in Thailand.

In early this year, the authorities in Tuong Duong district, Nghe An province, suppressed five families practicing the Evangelical faith, arresting five men from these families. Local authorities employed various oppressive tactics such as burning rice fields, killing livestock, using loudspeakers to vilify these families, aiming to divide and isolate them from their neighbors. The local government also installed surveillance cameras at the entrance to the village to monitor anyone coming or going, as well as having contact with the affected families. Additionally, the police and authorities collaborated on propaganda and persuasion campaigns to make these families comply and renounce their religious beliefs.

In both cases, the victims were participating in religious activities with the Vietnam Evangelical Church, a recognized religious organization by the government. The Northern General Assembly, upon receiving information about these incidents, engaged with local authorities to confirm that the religious activities were legal and permitted by the central government. However, the local oppression did not decrease.

According to the U.S. Department of State's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report,⁹ this marks the fourth consecutive year that the Vietnamese government has not recognized any new religious organizations, including branches of previously approved larger groups. For example, the Vietnam Baptist Church submitted around 40 registration applications for collective

⁹Vietnam 2022 International Religious Freedom. (2023, May 15). U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/441219-VIETM-2022-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

religious activities in northern mountainous provinces, but the success rate has been minimal. Besides the Vietnam Baptist Church, many religious groups have submitted registration applications but have not been recognized.

Christianity is also facing interference and restrictions on legitimate religious activities from the government. According to information from the Archdiocese¹⁰ of Ho Chi Minh City, on March 22, 2023, the authorities in Dak Nong commune, Ngoc Hoi district, Kon Tum province, intervened in a religious ceremony being held at the St. Paul's congregation, Dak Giac parish, Dak Nong commune. In a video recorded by parishioners, a man dressed casually who identified himself as Thach, the Deputy Chairman of Dak Nong commune, pointed at the clergyman and questioned "Who is this man?". He demanded the cessation of the ceremony and insisted on going to the Commune People's Committee for an inquiry. Subsequently, a woman identified by the parishioners as the Deputy Chairwoman of the commune approached the altar and arbitrarily folded the Bible that the priest was reading, hugged it to herself, and left, but the parishioners objected. Another person in casual attire turned off the lights in the prayer house while the congregation was reciting prayers. This was the third consecutive occasion where the local authorities obstructed the offering of Mass by the priest and parishioners of St. Paul's congregation, which consists of around 20 families. Similar incidents occurred in the two previous sessions, and the police even demanded the confiscation of the parishioners' motorcycles but faced strong opposition.

The oppression, originally targeting unrecognized religious groups, has recently extended to registered Christian denominations, hindering their development. Additionally, the controversy surrounding the ordination of Mr. Ho Huu Hoa has caused a major scandal within the Catholic Church in Vietnam, raising questions about the subtle yet forceful interference by the Vietnamese government in the selection of religious dignitaries.

6. Non-discrimination Rights of Minority Groups

According to the 2019 statistics from the General Statistics Office, Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups, with the Kinh people comprising 85.7% of the total population, and the remaining

¹⁰ <https://tgpsaigon.net/bai-viet/ve-vu-viec-can-bo-pha-roi-va-xuc-pham-thanh-le-tai-giao-ho-phaolo-thuoc-giao-xu-dak-giac-68373>

53 ethnic groups making up 14.3%. Most ethnic minority communities reside in specific regions and develop distinct characteristics in customs, beliefs, and religions. Despite this, the Vietnamese government refuses to acknowledge the existence of "indigenous people" in the country and refers to non-Kinh ethnic communities as "ethnic minorities." The government claims that it consistently implements policies of solidarity and non-discrimination. However, in reality, there are many shortcomings in policies, and the government's approach to addressing issues lacks dialogue, creating ethnic tensions that are challenging to resolve.

As analyzed above, religion is used by the government as a tool for social management, especially with indigenous communities, leading to the prohibition of independent religious activities. The practice of religion and organizing religious activities are legitimate needs of the people, but the government consistently rejects them, even when citizens request guidance on registering religious activities according to the law. Home-based Protestant groups, if discovered, face suppression by the police. Believers are summoned for questioning, pressured to renounce their faith, or even arrested and brought for public reprimand throughout the entire village, as happened to some Protestant believers in Phu Yen in early 2021.¹¹ Many cases have been reported where the government exerted pressure through administrative difficulties, including the denial of issuing personal documents and the review of preferential economic policies for ethnic minority groups. The most severe cases involve believers being arrested and sentenced to several years in prison, causing families to lose their economic pillars.

Meanwhile, the economic livelihood of ethnic minorities has not improved. According to a 2023 UNDP study,¹² while constituting only about 15% of the population, ethnic minorities make up 90% of the extremely poor people in all of Vietnam and over 50% of the multidimensionally poor. Their average income is only 40-50% of the national average. This is largely due to deficiencies in land policies, as the state reclaims land from people engaged in cultivation to allocate to private enterprises. Land acquisition policies are prevalent in the Central Highlands, targeting economic and social development goals for the region, without considering

¹¹ https://www.rfa.org/vietMese/in_depth/montagnard-evangelical-church-of-christ-faithful-are-publicly-denounced-01192021165825.html

¹² <https://www.undp.org/vietM/blog/digital-solutions-empower-ethnic-minority-women-vietM>

the impact on the lives of people losing their land, especially when their main livelihood is agriculture. Those losing land receive meager compensation, and there is no guidance on transitioning professions to stabilize their lives.

Many land disputes between citizens and businesses have persisted for decades without resolution, leading to violent conflicts and even loss of life.¹³ Despite this, such incidents continue to occur in 2023:

- On February 20, 2023, ethnic minority K'Ho people in K'Ren village, Hiep An commune, Duc Trong district, Lam Dong province, protested against the Ta Hoet reservoir project when the local government organized a groundbreaking ceremony. The police used rubber batons to suppress the people's opposition, resulting in injuries.¹⁴

- On April 21, 2023, hundreds of Ede ethnic people in Ea Bhok commune, Cu Kuin district, Dak Lak province, protested against a wastewater discharge project into the lake. Riot police were dispatched to quell the protest, resulting in numerous injuries and arrests.¹⁵

In provinces where ethnic minorities reside, the representation of minority people in public positions remains limited. In some provinces in the Central Highlands, such as Lam Dong and Kon Tum, the percentage of officials from ethnic minorities is around 6.6% and 15.86%, respectively. Gia Lai province, while having over 50% of its population belonging to ethnic minorities, has only about 16.7% of the provincial officials from ethnic minorities.¹⁶ The lack of indigenous representation in the government exacerbates unresolved conflicts in people's lives.

Discriminatory policies regarding religion, economics, and politics over the years have deepened tensions between ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands and the majority Kinh people. These long-standing conflicts escalated into a violent event on June 11, 2023, when an armed group attacked government offices in Ea Tieu and Eatur, Cu Kuin district, Dak Lak province. The attack resulted in nine fatalities, including four police officers, two commune officials, and three civilians. All the victims were Kinh people.

¹³ <https://www.bbc.com/vietMese/articles/cy9q0vy171eo>

¹⁴ <https://www.rfa.org/vietMese/news/vietMnews/lam-dong-riot-police-suppress-ethnic-minority-protesters-at-the-ta-hoet-reservoir-project-inauguration-02212023083757.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.rfa.org/vietMese/news/vietMnews/protest-against-waste-releasing-system-in-daklak-04242023091309.html>

¹⁶ <https://nhandan.vn/nang-cao-chat-luong-can-bo-nguoi-dan-toc-thieu-so-post759843.html>

The Vietnamese government labeled this incident as a terrorist attack and initiated a high-profile crackdown on crime in the Central Highlands and border areas. Additionally, many Kinh residents in the Central Highlands organized hunts for ethnic minorities to hand over to the police, regardless of whether they showed signs of being suspects, risking the potential harm of innocent individuals. These hunts were documented and shared on the social media platform TikTok as a demonstration of patriotism. The government has arrested and identified over 90 suspects related to the attack, who will face charges of terrorism.

Although the official conclusion attributes the cause of the June 11 attack to "unrelenting hostile forces," Minister of Public Security Tran Quoc To also acknowledged deeper-rooted issues such as wealth disparity and local land management problems. He made this statement as a National Assembly delegate during the plenary session of the National Assembly's Judiciary Committee's review of the Government's judicial work on September 6.¹⁷ This marks the first time that the authorities have admitted that the attack by the Thượng people in Dak Lak had underlying causes beyond "hostile forces pulling the strings," as propagated by state media.

It is evident that the consequences of oppressive and discriminatory policies towards religious and ethnic minorities in Vietnam have led to violent conflicts and regrettable loss of life.

V. Conclusion

In general, the Vietnamese government in 2023 continues to systematically and widely suppress various aspects of human rights. The new legal provisions and human rights practices are creating and will continue to set a negative precedent in ensuring the respect, enforcement, and protection of human rights.

The torture of detainees and prisoners persists, with false confessions and allegations of coercion by suspects being consistently disregarded and inadequately investigated. The government's disregard for human life is evident in the case of Le Van Manh's execution, who continued plea of innocence until the final moments of his life.

The Vietnamese government increasingly employs legal tools subtly to control its autocratic political power. In the past year, authorities have consistently refined legal provisions to tightly

¹⁷ <https://www.rfa.org/vietMese/news/vietMnews/deputy-minister-of-public-securities-admitted-the-root-causes-of-dak-lak-attacks-rich-poor-polarization-and-land-management-09072023091806.html>

control the online space. Any statements that influence or exhibit anti-regime sentiments are swiftly addressed through administrative or criminal measures. Most arrests and prosecutions in 2023 involve allegations of exploiting democratic freedoms under Article 331 of the 2015 Penal Code, a broad net allowing the government to capture any dissenting voices.

Human rights activists and defenders continue to face severe repression and harassment. Human rights lawyers and policy advocates have been turned into sacrificial lambs for the regime's campaign to unify discourse and entirely eliminate dissenting voices in Vietnam. Under government threats, many organizations and individuals have refused to work and cooperate with international organizations. Many activists have had to leave Vietnam seeking asylum in democratic countries. Even so, political refugees are not safe as the government begins to reveal the potential for cross-border oppression, both in cyberspace and in reality, with cases of hunting and kidnapping dissenting individuals in other countries.

Additionally, the situation of religious oppression is worsening, especially in areas with ethnic minorities. The government neither recognizes nor hesitates to suppress and eradicate minority religions and independent religious organizations. The lack of political and economic equality policies for ethnic minorities perpetuates poverty in their lives. This comprehensive oppression, both spiritually and materially, deepens the conflict between the people and the government.

The human rights situation in Vietnam is multifaceted with interconnected aspects, influencing each other, but ultimately, the decision-making and problem-causing subject is the Vietnamese government. Beyond a security lesson, incidents like the event of the June 11, 2023 attack serve as a reminder that the government needs to genuinely learn how to respect the basic and just human rights of all individuals living in this country.

Appendix

1. List of individuals arrested from December 10, 2022, to December 31, 2023.

| No. | Full Name | Year of birth | Gender | Field of Activism/ Group | Date of arrested (DD/MM/YY YY) | Accusation | Status |
|-----|-------------------------|---------------|--------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| 1. | Rlan Thih (Ama Phillip) | 1980 | M | Religion (protestant) | 19/12/2022 | 116 | Tried |
| 2. | Hoàng Ngọc Giao | 1954 | M | NGO (PLD) | 16/12/2022 | 200 | Pretrial detention |
| 3. | Hoàng Văn Vương | 1978 | M | Facebooker | 3/1/2023 | 331 | Tried |
| 4. | Lê Minh Thế | 1963 | M | Former POC | 22/02/2023 | 331 | Tried |
| 5. | Phan Thị Thanh Nhã | 1984 | F | PNGV * | 17/3/2023 | 109 | Tried |
| 6. | Y Kréc Byã | 1978 | M | Religion (protestant) | 08/04/2023 | 116 | Pretrial detention |
| 7. | Đường Văn Thái | 1982 | M | Citizen journalist | 14/04/2023 | 117 | Pretrial detention |
| 8. | Hoàng Thị Sơn | 1958 | F | Land rights | 22/04/2023 | 331 | Tried |
| 9. | Thái Thị Bé | 1956 | F | Land rights | 22/04/2023 | 331 | Tried |
| 10. | Đào Bá Cường | 1961 | M | Torture | 27/04/2023 | 331 | Tried |
| 11. | Nay Y Blang | 1976 | M | Religion (protestant) | 18/05/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 12. | Hoàng Thị Minh Hồng | 1972 | F | NGO (Change VN) | 31/05/2023 | 200 | Tried |
| 13. | Hoàng Khương | 1982 | M | Facebooker | tháng 5/2023 | 331 | Tried |
| 14. | Lê Thạch Giang | 1957 | M | Facebooker | 28/6/2023 | 331 | Tried |
| 15. | P.V.L. | 2002 | M | Facebooker | 11/7/2023 | 117 | Pretrial detention |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|------------------|------|---|---------------------|------------|-----|--------------------|
| 16. | Phan Tất Thành | 1986 | M | Facebooker | 5/7/2023 | 117 | Pretrial detention |
| 17. | Dương Tuấn Ngọc | 1985 | M | Facebooker | 11/7/2023 | 117 | Pretrial detention |
| 18. | Tô Hoàng Chương | 1988 | M | Khmer Krom activist | 31/7/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 19. | Thạch Cường | 1897 | M | Khmer Krom activist | 31/7/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 20. | Danh Minh Quang | 1987 | M | Khmer Krom activist | 31/7/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 21. | Nguyễn Hoàng M | 1982 | M | Hoà Hảo Buddhist | 5/8/2023 | 117 | Tried |
| 22. | Vũ Ngọc Sửu | 1973 | F | Facebooker | 22/8/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 23. | Hoàng Văn Luân | 1988 | M | Land rights | 23/8/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 24. | Ngô Thị Tố Nhiên | 1974 | F | NGO (VIETSE) | 15/9/2023 | 342 | Pretrial detention |
| 25. | Trần Đắc Thắng | 1980 | M | Facebooker | 29/9/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 26. | Nguyễn Thu Hằng | 1962 | F | Facebooker | 27/11/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 27. | Trần Minh Lợi | 1968 | M | Facebooker | 1/12/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 28. | Nguyễn Thị Xuyên | 1974 | F | Facebooker | 13/12/2023 | 331 | Pretrial detention |
| 29. | Phan Văn Bách | 1975 | M | CHTV | 29/12/2023 | 117 | Pretrial detention |

*PNGV: Provisional National Government of Vietnam

BFD: Brotherhood for Democracy



2. List of individuals under trial from December 10, 2022 to December 31, 2023

| No. | Full name | Year of birth | Gender | Field of Activism/ Group | Date of arrested (DD/MM/YYYY) | Accusation | 1st instance trial | 2nd instance trial | Years in prison |
|-----|------------------------|---------------|--------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Nguyễn Đoàn Quang Viên | 1982 | M | PNGV | 15/10/2021 | 109 | 13/01/2023 | | 14 |
| 2. | Nguyễn Văn Nghĩa | 1975 | M | PNGV | 5/11/2021 | 109 | 6/10/2022 | 28/3/2023 | 7 |
| 3. | Dương Thị Bé | 1982 | F | PNGV | 5/11/2021 | 109 | 6/10/2022 | 28/3/2023 | 5 |
| 4. | Phan Văn Phú | 1980 | M | PNGV | | 331 | 26/12/2022 | | 2.25 |
| 5. | Huỳnh Tiên | 1952 | M | PNGV | 28/4/2022 | 109 | | 14/3/2023 | 6 |
| 6. | Huỳnh Tài | 1986 | M | PNGV | 28/4/2022 | 109 | | 14/3/2023 | 2 |
| 7. | Trương Văn Dũng | 1958 | M | BFD | 21/5/2022 | 88 | 28/3/2023 | 13/7/2023 | 6 |
| 8. | Nguyễn Thái Hưng | 1976 | M | Youtuber | 05/01/2022 | 331 | 22/11/2022 | 29/3/2023 | 4 |
| 9. | Vũ Thị Kim Hoàng | 1978 | F | Youtuber | 05/01/2022 | 331 | 22/11/2022 | 29/3/2023 | 2.5 |
| 10. | Trần Văn Bang | 1961 | M | Facebooker | 01/03/2022 | 117 | 12/05/2021 | 29/8/2023 | 8 |
| 11. | Bùi Tuấn Lâm | 1984 | M | Facebooker | 07/09/2022 | 117 | 25/5/2023 | 30/8/2023 | 5.5 |
| 12. | Đặng Đăng Phước | 1963 | M | Facebooker | 08/09/2022 | 117 | 06/06/2023 | 26/9/2023 | 8 |
| 13. | Phan Sơn Tùng | 1984 | M | Youtuber | 09/09/2022 | 117 | 03/07/2023 | | 6 |
| 14. | Nguyễn Sơn Lộ | 1948 | M | NGO (SENA) | 02/02/2023 | 331 | 26/7/2023 | | 5 |
| 15. | Hoàng Văn Vương | 1978 | M | Facebooker | 3/1/2023 | 331 | 1/4/2023 | | 5 |
| 16. | Hoàng Thị Sơn | 1958 | F | Land rights | 22/04/2023 | 331 | 8/8/2023 | | 1.25 |
| 17. | Thái Thị Bé | 1956 | F | Land rights | 22/04/2023 | 331 | 8/8/2023 | | 1.25 |
| 18. | Vũ Ngọc Sửu | 1973 | F | Facebooker | 22/8/2023 | 331 | | 22/8/2023 | 1.5 |
| 19. | Ong Thị Thủy | 1963 | F | Land rights | 03/10/2022 | 331 | 14/09/2023 | | 3 |
| 20. | Vũ Bích Vân | 1971 | F | Land rights | 03/10/2022 | 331 | 14/09/2023 | | 5 |
| 21. | Trình Thị Sang | 1960 | F | Land rights | 15/11/2022 | 331 | 14/09/2023 | | 2 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|------|---|-----------------------|------------|-----|-------------|--|-----|
| 22. | Vũ Thị Nga | 1965 | F | Land rights | 15/11/2022 | 331 | 14/09/2023 | | 3 |
| 23. | Ngô Như Nghiệp | 1970 | M | Land rights | 15/11/2022 | 331 | 14/09/2023 | | 2.5 |
| 24. | Hoàng Khương | 1982 | M | Facebooker | tháng 5 | 331 | 15/9/2023 | | 6.5 |
| 25. | Rlan Thih (Ama Phillip) | 1980 | M | Religion (protestant) | 19/12/2022 | 116 | 28/9/2023 | | 8 |
| 26. | Nguyễn Minh Sơn | 1962 | M | Facebooker | 28/9/2022 | 117 | 29/9/2023 | | 6 |
| 27. | Lê Minh Thế | 1963 | M | Former POC | 22/02/2023 | 331 | 06/12/2023 | | 2.5 |
| 28. | Nguyễn Hoàng Nam | 1982 | M | Hoà Hảo Buddhist | 5/8/2023 | 117 | 11/12/2023 | | 8 |
| 29. | Phan Thị Thanh Nhã | 1984 | F | PNGV | 17/3/2023 | 109 | 12/12//2023 | | 6 |
| 30. | Đào Bá Cường | 1961 | M | Torture | 27/04/2023 | 331 | 12/12/2023 | | 2 |
| 31. | Nguyễn Lân Thắng | 1975 | M | Social activist | 05/07/2022 | 117 | 12/04/2023 | | 6 |
| 32. | Nguyễn Như Phương | 1991 | M | Facebooker | 30/8/2022 | 117 | 26/12/2022 | | 5 |
| 33. | Hoàng Thị Minh Hồng | 1972 | F | NGO (Change VN) | 31/05 | 200 | 28/9/2023 | | 3 |

3. List of dissidents and activists in pretrial detention (in accusation order)

| No. | Full name | Gender | Field of Activism | Date of arrested (DD/MM/YY) | Accusation |
|-----|--------------------|--------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Phan Thị Thanh Nhã | F | PNGV | 17/3/2023 | 109 |
| 2. | Y Krec Bya | M | Religion (protestant) | 08/4/2023 | 116 |
| 3. | Nguyễn Hoàng Nam | M | Hoà Hảo Buddhist | 24/7/2023 | 117 |
| 4. | P.V.L | M | Facebooker | 11/7/2023 | 117 |
| 5. | Dương Tuấn Ngọc | M | Facebooker | 10/7/2023 | 117 |
| 6. | Phan Tất Thành | M | Democracy activist | 05/7/2023 | 117 |
| 7. | Đường Văn Thái | M | Citizen Journalist | 13/4/2023 | 117 |
| 8. | Nguyễn Thuý Hạnh | F | Social activist | 07/4/2021 | 117 |

| | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------|---|------------------------|------------|-----|
| 9. | Nguyễn Duy Hường | M | Facebooker | 22/3/2021 | 117 |
| 10. | Phan Văn Bách | M | CHTV | 29/12/2023 | 117 |
| 11. | Hoàng Ngọc Giao | M | NGO sector | 20/12/2022 | 200 |
| 12. | Trần Đắc Thắng | M | Facebooker | 29/9/2023 | 331 |
| 13. | Hoàng Văn Luân | M | Social activist | 23/8/2023 | 331 |
| 14. | Danh Minh Quang | M | Khmer Krom activist | 31/7/2023 | 331 |
| 15. | Thạch Cường | M | Khmer Krom activist | 31/7/2023 | 331 |
| 16. | To Hoàng Chương | M | Khmer Krom activist | 29/6/2023 | 331 |
| 17. | Lê Thạch Giang | M | Facebooker | 18/5/2023 | 331 |
| 18. | Nay Y Blang | M | Religion (protestant) | 04/5/2023 | 331 |
| 19. | Lê Minh Thế | M | Former POC | 22/02/2023 | 331 |
| 20. | Võ Thanh Thời | M | Facebooker | 22/9/2022 | 331 |
| 21. | Võ Hoàng Thơ | M | Facebooker | 06/1-/2021 | 331 |
| 22. | Bạch Văn Hiền | M | Facebooker | 30/6/2021 | 331 |
| 23. | Lê Trung Thu | M | Facebooker | 30/6/2021 | 331 |
| 24. | Phùng Thanh Tuyền | M | Facebooker | 30/6/2021 | 331 |
| 25. | Nguyễn Thu Hằng | F | Facebooker | 27/11/2023 | 331 |
| 26. | Nguyễn Thị Xuyên | F | Facebooker | 13/12/2023 | 331 |
| 27. | Ngô Thị Tô Nhiên | F | Environmental activist | 15/9/2023 | 342 |