

URGENT ACTION

THREE ACTIVISTS FACE HARASSMENT AND RISK ARREST

Three human rights defenders engaged in activism relating to an ecological disaster in Viet Nam are facing severe harassment, including public denunciations, prosecution and death threats. They could be arrested for “conducting propaganda” against the state.

Since the deaths of an estimated 70 tonnes of fish, shrimp, squid and other animals along a 200 kilometre stretch of the Vietnamese central-eastern coastline in April 2016, demonstrations and other activities have taken place calling for information on the cause of the disaster. After two months of speculation, at a press conference in June, the government declared that Taiwanese company Formosa Plastics Group had admitted responsibility for the serious environmental disaster and that the company had pledged to pay VND11.5 trillion (US\$ 500 million) in compensation to the Vietnamese government to improve conditions in the affected provinces.

Father Đặng Hữu Nam, Nguyễn Văn Tráng and Paulus Lê Văn Sơn have been involved in organising activities calling for transparency and accountability in relation to the disaster, including compensation for those affected. Father Đặng Hữu Nam, a Catholic priest from Phú Yên parish, Vinh diocese in Nghệ An province has been helping to organize mass protests. He has also assisted with legal complaints from 506 people to Viet Nam’s authorities to claim compensation from Formosa Plastic Group company. Nguyễn Văn Tráng, a university student from Thanh Hóa province and a member of the Brotherhood for Democracy, an online pro-democracy discussion group, joined a protest against Formosa on 1 May and was arrested on 7 May and again on 19 May. Paulus Lê Văn Sơn, a former prisoner of conscience and Catholic social activist and journalist, has also participated in protests over the ecological disaster calling for justice and compensation.

Amnesty International is concerned that the three men are at imminent risk of arrest under Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code for “conducting propaganda” against the state. These charges provides for between three and 20 years’ imprisonment. The three men have also faced severe harassment which has intensified after their activities linked to the ecological catastrophe: Father Nam has been subjected to surveillance, death threats, arrests and beatings by security police and individuals in plain clothes; Nguyễn Văn Tráng has been targeted through public denunciations in local media, on the radio and on neighbourhood loudspeakers; Paulus Lê Văn Sơn has been subjected to surveillance, denounced in local media and now fears for his safety.

1) TAKE ACTION

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately end the harassment, attacks and threats against Father Đặng Hữu Nam, Nguyễn Văn Tráng and Paulus Lê Văn Sơn and other human rights defenders for their participation in peaceful protests.
- Calling on the authorities to ensure the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in accordance with Viet Nam’s obligations under international human rights law.

Contact these two officials by 9 December, 2016:

Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc
Prime Minister’s Office
Hà Nội, Việt Nam
Email: nguoiphatngonchinhphu@chinhphu.vn
Fax: + 84 80 44940
Salutation: Your Excellency

Ambassador H.E. Pham Quang Vinh
Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
1233 20th St NW Suite #400, Washington DC 20036
Fax: 1 202 861 0917 | Phone: 1 202 861 0737 | Email:
info@vietnambassay.us
Salutation: Dear Ambassador

2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

Here’s why it is so important to report your actions: we record the number of actions taken on each case and use that information in our advocacy. **Either email uan@aiusa.org with “UA 246/16” in the subject line or [click this link](#).**

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As many as 260,000 people, including fishermen, in the coastal provinces of Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, and Thừa Thiên - Huế have been affected by the deaths of millions of fish in April 2016.

After a two month investigation into the ecological disaster, the government confirmed allegations by the public that a steel plant owned by the Taiwanese Formosa Plastics Group had caused discharges of toxic waste. At the end of June, Formosa publicly apologised and announced that it would provide US\$ 500 million in compensation, but those affected have said that this is insufficient reparation for the impact and loss of livelihoods. The 506 complaints made for additional compensation have been rejected by the authorities.

The Vietnamese authorities cracked down heavily in response to a series of demonstrations taking place throughout the country in May 2016, organised following the decimation of Viet Nam's fish stocks. Wide-ranging police measures to prevent and punish participation in demonstrations has resulted in a range of human rights violations including torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, as well as violations of the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of movement, see Public Statement, *Viet Nam: Government crackdowns on peaceful demonstrations with range of rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa41/4078/2016/en/>. Despite these heavy-handed tactics, peaceful protests have continued, but those involved in organizing and submitting additional formal complaints to the authorities are being increasingly targeted with harassment and threats. The harassment includes pressure on families and employers of those targeted, making it difficult for activists to continue.

Viet Nam is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantees the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. However, these rights are severely restricted in law and practice in Viet Nam. Vaguely worded articles in the national security section of Viet Nam's 1999 Penal Code are frequently used to criminalize peaceful dissenting views or activities. Those at risk include people advocating for peaceful political change, criticizing government policies, or calling for respect for human rights. Article 88 (Conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam) is frequently used to detain, prosecute and imprison dissidents for their peaceful activism, including bloggers, labour rights and land rights activists, political activists, religious followers of different churches, human rights defenders and social justice activists, and even song writers.

Name: Father Đặng Hữu Nam, Nguyễn Văn Tráng, Paulus Lê Văn Sơn
Gender m/f: m

UA: 246/16 Index: ASA 41/5070/2016 Issue Date: 28 October 2016