



August 16, 2021

Vice President Kamala Harris
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20500

Re: Amnesty International USA urges Vice President Harris to raise human rights concerns on upcoming trip to Vietnam

Dear Vice President Harris:

On behalf of Amnesty International and our 10 million members, activists, and supporters worldwide, we welcome the news of your upcoming trip to Vietnam. We urge you to address pressing human rights concerns in your meetings with Vietnamese authorities.

In recent years, arbitrary arrests and prosecutions of human rights defenders have increased significantly in Vietnam. Individuals who express themselves online are particularly targeted. Pro-democracy activists, independent journalists, authors, and publishers face sustained harassment, physical assault, arbitrary prosecution and torture and other ill-treatment in police custody.

The United States can play a powerful role in pushing Vietnamese authorities to address these violations and end further abuses. We urge you to raise the critical rights issues outlined below on your upcoming trip.

Freedom of Expression: In a December 2020 [report](#), Amnesty International documented the systematic repression and criminalization of peaceful online expression in Vietnam. Tech giants Facebook and Google are increasingly [complicit](#) in the Vietnamese authorities' censorship of internet users, often in violation of international human rights law and standards. Amnesty further documented that groups affiliated with the government deploy sophisticated campaigns on these platforms in an attempt to harass everyday users into silence and fear. AIUSA's National Advocacy Director Joanne Lin [testified](#) about Big Tech's complicity in censorship in Viet Nam at a December 9, 2020 House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee hearing on International Human Rights and the Closing Civic Space.

In February 2021, an [investigation](#) by Amnesty International identified a campaign of spyware attacks targeting Vietnamese human rights defenders. Amnesty attributed these attacks to a group known as Ocean Lotus.

Vietnamese authorities have been actively suppressing online speech amid the COVID-19 pandemic and have brought serious criminal charges against multiple internet users for comments critical of the government. Vietnam is currently jailing more than 170 prisoners of conscience, of whom 69 are behind bars solely for their peaceful social media activity.

- We urge you to call on Vietnamese authorities to stop weaponizing online platforms and punishing people for exercising their right to freedom of expression.
- We urge you to call on the Vietnamese authorities to conduct an independent investigation into the unlawful targeted surveillance of human rights defenders, including investigating Ocean Lotus and determining whether there are links between this spyware campaign and any specific government agencies.

Persecution of Human Rights Defenders: As of December 2020, at least 173 known prisoners of conscience were [imprisoned](#) in Viet Nam, the highest recorded number since Amnesty International began publishing these figures in 1996. Most were held under either Article 331 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe the interests of the State”, carrying penalties of up to seven years’ imprisonment, or Article 117, which criminalizes “making, storing or spreading information, materials or items for the purpose of opposing the State of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam” and carries a sentence of up to 20 years’ imprisonment.

Prison conditions remain generally harsh, but prisoners of conscience in particular are subjected to discrimination, harassment and ill-treatment. Family members reported incidents of prisoners of conscience being subjected to torture or other ill-treatment in detention, including Nguyen Van Hoa, Nguyen Van Tuc, Huynh Truong Ca, Nguyen Ngoc Anh and Le Dinh Luong.

In May 2021, land rights activists and human rights defenders Trinh Ba Tu and his mother Can Thi Theu were both [sentenced](#) to eight years’ imprisonment followed by three years’ probation after being convicted under Article 117.

Can Thi Theu became an activist after her family’s land was confiscated by the authorities in 2010. She has been arrested and convicted twice before, for participation in peaceful protests and for filming a forced eviction. Her sons, Trinh Ba Tu and Trinh Ba Phuong, became activists during her imprisonment. On 24 June 2020, police arrested Can Thi Theu, Trinh Ba Phuong and Trinh Ba Tu. Trinh Ba Phuong remains in pre-trial detention.

In April 2021, human rights defender Nguyen Thuy Hanh was [arrested](#) in a blatant politically motivated attempt to silence her advocacy, including her work on behalf of unjustly detained prisoners.

- We urge you to call on the Vietnamese authorities to release all those unjustly imprisoned in Vietnamese jails; to overturn the unjust convictions of Trinh Ba Tu and Can Thi Theu without delay and authorize their immediate and unconditional release; to immediately and unconditionally release Nguyen Thuy Hanh; and to end these relentless attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful critics.

US Trade Representative Investigation and Indigenous People's Rights in Cambodia: Widespread illegal logging in Cambodia is leading to serious violations of Indigenous peoples' rights and significantly contributing to the climate crisis. The continued trade of illicit timber into Vietnam from Cambodia is an important enabler of these violations.

Improved oversight and due diligence on the import of Cambodian timber by Vietnam would play an important role in protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights in Cambodia. At present, the US Trade Representative is undertaking a Section 301 [investigation](#) into Vietnam's import and use of illegal timber in its export market.

- We urge you to call on the Vietnamese authorities to ensure that robust and meaningful due diligence is implemented in respect to timber imports from Cambodia, aimed at guaranteeing that no timber that is linked to violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights can be imported.

Thank you for your consideration of those pressing human rights issues. For more information or any questions you may have, please contact Joanne Lin, National Director for Advocacy and Government Affairs or Carolyn Nash, Advocacy Director for Asia. We are available to providing briefings at your convenience.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,

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