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VIET NAM

CRACKDOWN ON FORMOSA SPILL ACTIVISTS CONTINUES

The Vietnamese authorities are continuing to crackdown on activists who have raised concerns about the 2016 Formosa environmental disaster and its aftermath. On 12 May 2017, an arrest warrant was issued for activist Bạch Hồng Quyền, who is now in hiding, while human rights defender and blogger Hoàng Đức Bình has been detained since 15 May 2017. Other activists are also facing harassment and intimidation, and are at risk of arrest.

On the morning of 15 May, human rights defender and blogger Hoàng Duc Bình was arrested by the authorities in Nghe An, a province in north-central Viet Nam. He has been charged with "resisting persons in the performance of their official duties" under article 257 of Viet Nam's 1999 Penal Code, and "abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, the legitimate rights and interests of organizations and/or citizens" under article 258. Under each charge Hoàng Duc Bình faces a possible sentence of between six months' and seven years' imprisonment.

Hoàng Duc Bình, Vice Chairman of the independent Viet Labor Movement, has been blogging about and assisting those affected by the Formosa environmental disaster which occurred in April 2016, severely affecting fish stocks in multiple Vietnamese provinces. He was travelling with a Catholic priest, Father Nguyen Dinh Thuc, at the time of his arrest and was reportedly forced to sign a confession statement by the authorities after being detained in Dien Châu district of Nghe An province. It is not known exactly where he is being held. Father Nguyen Dinh Thuc, who has also been active in supporting those affected by the environmental crisis, has also faced threats and intimidation for his activities, and is at risk of arrest.

Another Vietnamese activist blogger, Bach Hong Quyen, who is a member of the Viet Nam Path Movement, a peaceful reform group not sanctioned by the authorities, is also being pursued by the authorities after a warrant was issued for his arrest on 12 May. He is currently in hiding and faces charges of "causing public disorder" for his alleged role in organizing a demonstration on 3 April calling for accountability and transparency in relation to the Formosa environmental disaster. Both his wife and parents have been visited by the authorities seeking his arrest.

Please send a letter, email, fax or tweet without delay. (Postage \$2.50.) Call on the Vietnamese authorities to:

* Immediately and unconditionally release Hoàng Duc Bình, who is a prisoner of conscience, held for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression, and drop all charges against him and Bach Hong Quyen, for who police have issued an arrest warrant.

* Ensure an immediate end to arbitrary arrests, prosecutions, and harassment of human rights defenders and activists calling for transparency and accountability for the environmental disaster that occurred in April 2016.

* Uphold and facilitate the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression.

Here is the contact information you will need:

Prime Minister

Nguyen Xuân Phúc

Prime Minister's Office

Hà Noi, Viet Nam

Email: nguoiiphatngonchinhphu@chinhphu.vn

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Public Security

To Lam

44 Yet Kiêu St.

Hoàn Kiem District

Hà Noi, Viet Nam

Fax: 011 844 3823 1872

c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Email: ttl.mfa@mofa.gov.vn

Salutation: Dear Minister

Please send a copy to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister

Pham Binh Minh

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1 Ton That Dam Street,

Ba Dinh district

Hà Noi, Viet Nam

Fax: 011 844 3823 18

His Excellency Duc Hoa NGUYEN (M)

Ambassador Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

55 Mackay Street Ottawa,

ON K1M 2B2 Canada.

Tel: 1 (613) 236-0772

E-mail: vietnamembassy@rogers.com

Or vietem-inter@uniserve.com

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The first signs of the Formosa ecological disaster came in April 2016 when huge levels of fish were found dead in waters adjoining the coastal provinces of Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, Thừa Thiên-Huế and Nghệ An. As many as 270,000 people, including fishermen and women and others who rely on the fishing industry for their livelihoods, as well as that of their families, have been affected by the deaths of millions of fish. After a two month investigation into the disaster, the government confirmed allegations by the public that a steel plant owned by the Taiwanese Formosa Plastics Group, based in Hà Tĩnh province, was the source of discharges of toxic waste into coastal waters. At the end of June 2016, Formosa publicly apologized and announced that it would provide \$500 million USD in compensation, but those affected have said that this is insufficient reparation for the impact of the spill and loss of livelihoods.

On 29 September 2016, Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc issued Decision 1880 in which he outlined how the compensation would be distributed. The decision stated that only victims from the four provinces of Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, and Thừa Thiên-Huế would be included in the compensation scheme. The decision was made days after 506 complaints were filed with the People's Court in Hà Tĩnh province by people calling to have suffered damages as a result of the disaster. On 5 October 2016, the 506 complaints were rejected on the reported grounds that the complainants failed to provide evidence of their material loss and on the procedural basis that a court is barred from making a ruling on an incident where a binding decision on the same issue has been made by a government entity. The 619 complaints that were prevented from being delivered to the People's Court in Hà Tĩnh province on 14 February 2017 are from individuals from Nghệ An, which is not included in the compensation scheme of Decision 1880.

The Formosa disaster has become an issue of major public concern in Viet Nam. The country has seen demonstrations on a previously unseen scale, both in terms of frequency and the number of participants. Authorities cracked down heavily in response to a series of demonstrations taking place throughout the country in May 2016 and, in October 2016, a demonstration against Formosa in Hà Tĩnh was reported to have involved as many as 20,000 participants. Wide-ranging police measures to prevent and punish participation in demonstrations 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.

As protests and demands for transparency and accountability continue in 2017, the authorities are responding with threats, harassment, intimidation and physical violence against those involved in organizing and submitting complaints. Human rights defenders and activists involved in organizing protests are being increasingly targeted.

On 15 February 2017, [Amnesty International called for the release of Nguyễn Văn Hóa](#), a blogger from Kỳ Anh district, north central Viet Nam, who was arrested on 11 January 2017. He had been helping fishermen affected by the Formosa ecological disaster.