

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Systemic Repression Intensifies Ahead of Dialogue

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Twenty-five political prisoners currently locked up for exercising basic rights. (c) 2018 Private

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Twenty-five political prisoners currently locked up for exercising basic rights. 2018 Private

(Brussels) The [European Union](#) should press the [Vietnamese](#) government on human rights issues, Human Rights Watch said today in advance of the 8th EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue, scheduled for March 4, 2019 in Brussels.

In a [submission](#) to the EU, Human Rights Watch said that the EU should press Vietnam to immediately release [political prisoners](#) and detainees; end repression of free speech, association, assembly and movement; allow freedom of information; cease interference with religious affairs; and take concrete measures to curb police brutality.

Vietnam has strengthened its crackdown in the last couple of years against activists who campaign for basic civil and political rights and punishes them with harsh prison sentences, said [Phil Robertson](#), deputy Asia director. The EU should remind Vietnam that it expects meaningful human rights improvements in order for their bilateral political and economic relations to move forward.

EU-Vietnam bilateral relations are regulated by their 2012 [Partnership and Cooperation Agreement](#), which defines the respect for democratic principles and human rights as an essential element of the agreement. Vietnam also benefits from the EUs Generalized Scheme of Preferences, which allows for tariff reductions for countries that ratify and comply with core labor and human rights conventions.

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In October 2018, the European Commission [announced the adoption](#) of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement, which is awaiting consent by the European Council and Parliament to enter into force. Despite weak provisions on human rights, the agreement has a strong link to the Partnership Agreement and could be suspended if Vietnam fails to implement its human rights obligations.

In September 2018, 32 Members of the European Parliament [signed a public letter](#) raising serious concerns about Vietnams ongoing crackdown on human rights and calling on the country to improve its human rights record ahead of any vote on the free trade agreement. The same concerns were raised with Vietnams deputy trade minister in October during a debate in the European Parliament, and again in an [urgency resolution](#) in November. In February 2019, the EU announced that [the vote on the trade agreement had been postponed](#).

During 2018, Vietnamese authorities convicted at least 42 rights activists and bloggers under various abusive laws, almost triple the number of convictions in 2017, including [Le Dinh Luong](#) (20 years), [Luu Van Vinh](#) (15 years), [Hoang Duc Binh](#) (14 years), [Nguyen Quoc Hoan](#) (13 years), [Nguyen Van Tuc](#) (13 years), [Nguyen Trung Truc](#) (12 years), [Nguyen Trung Ton](#) (12 years), [Truong Minh Duc](#) (12 years), [Vuong Van Tha](#) (12 years), [Nguyen Bac Truyen](#) (11 years), [Nguyen Van Duc Do](#) (11 years), [Tu Cong Nghia](#) (10 years), and [Tran Thi Xuan](#) (9 years).

The authorities systematically use draconian provisions of Vietnams criminal code to suppress peaceful dissent. Its criminal procedure code allows authorities to hold those who are suspected of violating national security in police custody without access to a lawyer as long as the authorities see fit.

Nguyen Danh Dung, a blogger, has been forcibly disappeared since his arrest in December 2016. A former political prisoner and high-profile blogger, [Truong Duy Nhat](#), who fled to Bangkok to seek asylum in mid-January mysteriously disappeared in Thailand on January 26 and has not been heard from since. His disappearance evokes the case of a former oil company executive and asylum seeker, Trinh Xuan Thanh, who was kidnapped by Vietnamese government officials in Germany and forcibly returned to Vietnam in July 2017.

Unidentified men [assault rights bloggers and activists with impunity](#). In August, the [activists Pham Doan Trang, Nguyen Tin, and Nguyen Dang Cao Dai](#) were beaten severely after a police raid on a concert in Ho Chi Minh City. In September, unidentified thugs attacked and broke the arm of a former political prisoner, Truong Van Kim in Lam Dong.

The Vietnamese government also stepped up its online repression. In January, a [highly problematic law](#) on cybersecurity went into effect. Under this new law, service providers must take down posts that offend the authorities within 24 hours of receiving a request from the police. Internet companies are required [to store data locally](#), verify user information, and disclose user data to state security officials on demand without a court order, all of which threaten the right to privacy and could facilitate further suppression of online dissent or activism.

This human rights dialogue is an important tool for the EU to demonstrate to Vietnam how seriously the EU is committed to promote rights, yet its not the only one, Robertson said. Human rights should be an integral part of every discussions and negotiations between the EU, its member states and Vietnam.

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Movement Restrictions on Rights Activists in Vietnam

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