

# Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/07/vietnam-torture-forced-labor-drug-detention>

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Companies, Donors Should Press Government to Close Centers

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(Bangkok) People detained by the police in [Vietnam](#) for using drugs are held without due process for years, forced to work for little or no pay, and suffer torture and physical violence, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Government-run drug detention centers, mandated to treat and rehabilitate drug users, are little more than forced labor camps where drug users work six days a week processing cashews, sewing garments, or manufacturing other items.

The 121-page report, [The Rehab Archipelago: Forced Labor and Other Abuses in Drug Detention Centers in Southern Vietnam](#), documents the experiences of people confined to 14 detention centers under the authority of the Ho Chi Minh City government. Refusing to work, or violating center rules, results in punishment that in some cases is torture. Quynh Luu, a former detainee who was caught trying to escape from one center, described his punishment: First they beat my legs so that I couldn't run off again... [Then] they shocked me with an electric baton [and] kept me in the punishment room for a month.

Tens of thousands of men, women and children are being held against their will in government-run forced labor centers in Vietnam, said [Joe Amon](#), health and human rights director at Human Rights Watch. This is not drug treatment, the centers should be closed, and these people should be released.

International donor support to the centers, and to the Vietnamese governments Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, which oversees them, can have the perverse impact of enabling the government to continue to detain HIV-positive drug users, Human Rights Watch said. Under Vietnamese law, HIV-positive detainees have a right to be released if drug detention centers cannot provide appropriate medical care.

Vietnam's system of forced labor centers for drug users has its origin in re-education through labor camps for drug users and sex workers established following the victory of North Vietnam in 1975. The centers received renewed political support in the mid-1990s during a government campaign to eradicate so-called social evils, including drug use. As Vietnam's economy has modernized, the system has expanded. In 2000, there were 56 such centers across Vietnam; by early 2011, there were 123.

People are commonly held in the centers after police detain them or family members volunteer them for detention. In a few cases, individuals volunteer themselves, believing the centers provide effective drug dependency treatment.

Former detainees told Human Rights Watch that they were sent to the centers without a formal legal hearing or trial, and without seeing a lawyer or judge. They said that they were unaware of any means to review or appeal the decision to detain them. Those detainees who entered on a voluntary basis said that they were not free to leave and that their detention was arbitrarily extended by center management or changes in government policy.

Detainees described performing menial labor for long periods processing cashews, farming, sewing clothing and shopping bags, working in construction, and manufacturing products made from wood, plastic, bamboo, and rattan. Kinh Mon, a former detainee, told Human Rights Watch: I did cashew husking for three years. I worked six and a half to eight hours a day to finish my quota. The fluid from the cashews burned my skin.

Some detainees work for years without pay. Others are paid a fraction of the minimum wage, and center management deducts food, lodging and so-called management fees from their pay. At the end of their detention, some detainees said, their families had to pay the centers for debts that center officials claimed the detainees owed.

Since 1994, international donors have worked with these centers on capacity building, including training center staff in forms of drug dependency treatment and support for HIV interventions. The HIV prevalence of detainees is unknown, but has been variously reported

at between 15 and 60 percent. Most centers offer no antiretroviral treatment or even basic medical care.

Some former detainees provided Human Rights Watch with the names of companies that allegedly had products processed in the centers. However the lack of transparency or any publicly accessible list of companies that have contracts with these government-run detention centers made corroborating the involvement of companies difficult. Often, detainees did not know the brand or company owning the products they worked on. Human Rights Watch said it is investigating companies that may have contracted with the detention centers.

Among the companies whose goods some detainees said they were forced to process were two Vietnamese companies, Son Long JSC, a cashew processing company, and Tran Boi Production Co. Ltd., which manufactures plastic goods. Human Rights Watch sent correspondence to both companies a number of times seeking their comments, but neither company replied.

Vietnamese media reports over the past decade identify both Son Long JSC and Tran Boi Productions Co. Ltd as producing products with detention center detainees. In 2011, the director of one detention center told a foreign journalist, with whom Human Rights Watch met, that Son Long JSC oversaw cashew processing within his center.

Forced labor is not treatment, and profit-making is not rehabilitation, Amon said. Donors should recognize that building the capacity of these centers perpetuates injustice, and companies should make sure their contractors and suppliers are not using goods from these centers.

Human Rights Watch called on the government of Vietnam to close down these centers permanently and to conduct an immediate, thorough, and independent investigation into torture, ill treatment, arbitrary detention, and other abuses in the countrys drug detention centers. The government should also make public a list of all companies that have contracts with detention centers for processing or manufacturing products.

Donors, and their implementing agencies, should review their assistance to detention centers and ensure that no funding is supporting policies or programs that violate international human rights law.

Companies working with Vietnams drug detention centers, including through sub-contractors, should end such relationships immediately, Human Rights Watch said.

People who are dependent on drugs in Vietnam need access to community-based, voluntary treatment, Amon said. Instead, the government is locking them up, private companies are exploiting their labor, and international donors are turning a blind eye to the torture and abuses they face.

#### **Selected accounts from individuals interviewed for The Rehab Archipelago:**

I was caught by police in a roundup of drug users. They took me to the police station in the morning and by that evening I was in the drug center. I saw no lawyer, no judge.

Quy Hop, detained in Binh Duc center (Binh Phuoc province) for four years

People did refuse to work but they were sent to the disciplinary room. There they worked longer hours with more strenuous work and if they balked at that work; then they were beaten. No one refused to work completely.

Ly Nhan, detained in Nhi Xuan center (Ho Chi Minh City) for four years

I had a quota of 30 kilos [of cashews] a day and worked until they were done. If you refused to work you were sent to the punishment room and after a month [there] you agreed to work again.

Vu Ban, detained in Center No. 2 (Lam Dong province) for five years

Work was compulsory. We produced bamboo furniture, bamboo products, and plastic drinking straws. We were paid by the hour for work eight-hour days, six days a week.

Luc Ngan, a child when first detained for three-and-a-half years at Youth Center No. 2 (Ho Chi Minh City)

On paper I earned [VND] 120,000 a month but they took it. The center staff said it paid for our food and clothes.

Quynh Luu, who spent over five years in detention in Center No. 3 (Binh Duong province)

If we opposed the staff they beat us with a one-meter, six-sided wooden truncheon. Detainees had the bones in their arms and legs broken. This was normal life inside.

Dong Van, detained for over four years in Center No. 5 (Dak Nong province)

[The solitary confinement cell] was about two meters by two meters with a small seat and small window. A toilet hole led outside. You could be held alone there for one to four months.

Cho Don, a woman detained for five years in Phu Van center (Binh Phuoc province)

No one refused to work by not going to the workplace. Everyone worked, including the children.

Thai Hoa, detained at Youth Center No. 2 (Ho Chi Minh City) for five years

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