

Human Rights Watch

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Prime Minister Kishida Should Press for Reforms in Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam

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(Tokyo) [Japan's](#) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida should press the governments of [Indonesia](#), [Thailand](#), and [Vietnam](#) to improve their human rights records during his upcoming visit to the three countries, Human Rights Watch said today. Kishida will reportedly visit the countries from late April to early May, 2022.

Japan should use its influence as a major economic investor and donor to press Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam to improve their human rights records, said [Kanae Doi](#), Japan director at Human Rights Watch. Prime Minister Kishida should recognize that Japan's credibility depends on fulfilling the governments human rights [pledges](#) by both publicly and privately raising rights concerns while abroad.

In Indonesia, Kishida should urge the government of President Joko Widodo to combat religious discrimination by Islamist politicians and militants, and the use of the [blasphemy law](#) as a political weapon against opponents and religious minorities. Kishida should highlight that the draft criminal codes proposed expansion of the blasphemy law threatens the rights to freedom of religion, association, and expression.

President Widodo's government tried to overcome [abusive mandatory hijab regulations](#) in state schools in February 2021, but [the Supreme Court cancelled the rule](#). Kishida should urge Widodo to issue a new central government regulation that revokes more than 60 local and national rules that violate women and girls' rights by requiring them to wear the hijab. The Indonesian government should also end discriminatory government regulations against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

In Thailand, Prime Minister Kishida should raise serious concerns with Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha about his government's intensified restrictions on fundamental rights, particularly free expression and peaceful assembly, by arresting democracy activists and critics of the monarchy. The Thai government has also imposed restrictions on opposition political activities and assemblies by arbitrarily enforcing provisions of a nationwide state of emergency, using the Covid-19 pandemic as a pretext, and sometimes violently cracking down on youth-led democracy protests. Kishida should expressly oppose the Thai government's proposed draft law that would severely restrict nongovernmental organizations, including Japanese government-funded groups, in violation of the rights to freedom of association and expression.

Kishida's visit to Thailand coincides with the 135th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Close political, economic, and sociocultural ties provide Japan with significant leverage to be frank and forthright in stressing that there can be no return to business as usual between Tokyo and Bangkok unless Thailand pursues genuine democratic rule and respect for human rights. In particular, Kishida should press Prayut to end repression of free expression and peaceful assembly.

In Vietnam, Prime Minister Kishida should express public concerns about the Vietnamese government's heightened crackdown on human rights activists and bloggers. At least 51 people in Vietnam were put on trial, convicted, and sentenced to many years in [prison](#) between December 2020 and April 2022, for exercising their basic rights to freedom of expression, association, and religion. Kishida should call for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners, including [Pham Chi Dung](#), [Nguyen Tuong Thuy](#), [Le Huu Minh Tuan](#), [Can Thi Theu](#), [Trinh Ba Tu](#), [Pham Chi Thanh](#), [Pham Doan Trang](#), [Trinh Ba Phuong](#), [Nguyen Thi Tam](#), [Do Nam Trung](#), [Le Trong Hung](#), and [Le Van Dung](#).

Japan is Vietnam's most important bilateral donor. Kishida should publicly express concerns that the Vietnamese Communist Party prohibits the formation and operation of any organization or group deemed threatening to its monopoly of power. He should press Vietnam to respect freedom of online expression, and to stop blocking access to websites or pressing social media and telecommunications companies to remove contents deemed politically sensitive.

Those who criticize the one-party government, including on social media, face police intimidation, harassment, restricted movement,

physical assault, and arbitrary arrest and detention. Police detain political activists for months without access to legal counsel and subject them to abusive interrogations; then, party-controlled courts convict bloggers and activists on bogus national security charges and impose lengthy prison sentences.

In February this year, Human Rights Watch published the report [Locked Inside Our Home: Movement Restrictions on Rights Activists in Vietnam](#), which details the Vietnamese governments systemic and severe restriction of freedom of movement between 2004 and 2021. In March, security agents prevented [eight democracy supporters](#) from attending [an event](#) in Hanoi to show solidarity and support for Ukraine in the face of the Russian invasion.

Kishida should publicly urge the Vietnamese government to release everyone imprisoned for exercising their rights, such as criticizing the government, joining a rights group, or worshiping in a way without Communist Party approval.

Japan proudly claims its commitment to protecting human rights on the global stage, but in practice it does little to press rights-abusing governments in Asia to improve their records, Doi said. Prime Minister Kishidas Southeast Asia trip is an important opportunity to break with Tokyos longstanding public silence on abuses abroad and instead assert global leadership on rights issues.

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