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Ex-Political Prisoner Tran Duc Thach Again Faces Prison

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(New York) The [Vietnamese](#) authorities should immediately drop all charges and release the dissident and poet Tran Duc Thach, Human Rights Watch said today. On April 23, 2020, Vietnamese police arrested Tran Duc Thach, a longtime dissident in Vietnam, for being affiliated with a pro-democracy group. He was charged with subversion, and is scheduled to go on trial on November 30.

The Vietnamese government wants to punish Tran Duc Thach for his work promoting human rights and justice, claiming his exercise of free speech is a crime, said [John Sifton](#), Asia advocacy director. Other governments should be raising their concerns ahead of his trial and calling for his release.

After Tran Duc Thachs arrest, the authorities did not allow him to see his attorney until November 5, and then only under police supervision. His lawyer, Ha Huy Son, [told the media](#) he could not even photocopy Tran Duc Thachs indictment papers, but only take notes by hand.

Tran Duc Thach, 69, [has written](#) hundreds of poems, a novel, and numerous articles, most of which condemn corruption, injustice, and human rights abuses in Vietnam. A veteran of the Peoples Liberation Army, he was a member of the Nghe An Writers Club. His 1988 novel, *Doi ban tu* (Two Companions in Prison) described the arbitrary nature of Vietnams legal system and the inhumane conditions in Vietnamese prisons. Poems published under the title *Dieu chua thay* (Things Still Untold) speak about life without freedom and justice.

The authorities have repeatedly harassed him since 1975. In 1978, to protest his mistreatment, he set himself on fire and was badly burned. In 2008, he participated in anti-China protests and was arrested in September that year. He [was accused of writing](#) many articles that distort the truth, slander, and badmouth the party and the state, and publishing them on *To Quoc* magazine, a clandestine dissident bulletin. In October 2009, a court found him guilty of carrying out propaganda against the state under article 88 of the penal code. He was sentenced to three years in prison.

After completing his prison term in 2011, Tran Duc Thach resumed his criticism of the Communist Party and the state. He joined the Brotherhood for Democracy in April 2013. On April 23, 2020, police arrested him in Nghe An province and charged him with carrying out activities that aim to overthrow the peoples government under article 109 of the penal code. Tran Duc Thach is the 10th member of the Brotherhood for Democracy arrested in recent years.

The Brotherhood for Democracy was founded in April 2013 by the dissident [Nguyen Van Dai](#) and fellow activists with a stated goal to defend human rights recognized by the Vietnam Constitution and international conventions and to promote the building of a democratic, progressive, civilized, and just society for Vietnam. The group provides a network for activists both in and outside of Vietnam who campaign for human rights and democracy in Vietnam.

Seven members of the group [Truong Minh Duc](#), [Nguyen Trung Ton](#), [Nguyen Bac Truyen](#), [Pham Van Troi](#), Tran Thi Xuan, [Nguyen Van Tuc](#), and [Nguyen Trung Truc](#) are serving long prison terms for carrying out activities that aim to overthrow the peoples administration under article 79 of the penal code. Two other members, Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thu Ha, were sent directly from prison to exile in Germany.

The jurists presiding over Tran Duc Thachs trial have a record of harsh punishments of dissidents. Judge Tran Ngoc Son and Judge Vi Van Chat have convicted and issued severe prison sentences for several pro-democracy campaigners. In December 2011, [Vi Van Chat](#) chaired the trial of a [blogger](#), [Ho Thi Bich Khuong](#), and a [pastor](#), [Nguyen Trung Ton](#), for conducting propaganda against the state. They were convicted and sentenced to five years and two years in prison respectively. In January 2013, [Tran Ngoc Son and Vi Van Chat](#) presided over the trial of [14 pro-democracy activists](#), and convicted and sentenced them to up to 13 years in prison. In August 2018, the

two judges presided over the trial [of a democracy campaigner, Le Dinh Luong](#), convicting and sentencing him to 20 years in prison.

Vietnams courts should be working to protect freedom of expression and other human rights, not enforcing the Communist Partys monopoly on power, Sifton said. Tran Duc Thach isnt going to receive a fair trial, because Vietnam doesnt have an independent and impartial judiciary.

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