

Human Rights Watch

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

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Do Nam Trung Could Receive Up to 12 Years in Prison for Peaceful Expression

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***Update:** On December 16, 2021, a court in Nam Dinh sentenced Do Nam Trung to 10 years in prison and four years of probation after his release.*

(New York) The [Vietnamese](#) authorities should immediately release the human rights activist Do Nam Trung and drop all charges against him, Human Rights Watch said today. Do Nam Trung, 40, previously spent 14 months in prison after he publicly advocated for democracy and human rights in the early 2010s.

Police arrested Do Nam Trung on July 6, 2021, and charged him with propaganda against the state under Article 117(1) of the Penal code. Between 2015 and 2021, Do Nam Trung participated in pro-environment protests and anti-China protests, and opposed government corruption. A court in Nam Dinh province is scheduled to hear his case on December 16. If convicted, he faces up to 12 years in prison.

Do Nam Trung is the latest victim of Vietnamese government retaliation against citizens who refuse to remain silent in the face of injustice and rights abuses, said [Phil Robertson](#), deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. Global pressure on the Vietnamese government is needed to repeal this abusive criminal law that blatantly violates the right to free expression.

In May 2014 police arrested Do Nam Trung and his friends Vu Thi Phuong Anh and Pham Minh Vu in Dong Nai province as they were taking photos and filming [anti-China protests](#).

The authorities charged them under what was then Article 258 of the Penal Code. They specifically were [accused](#) of abusing the rights to freedom and democracy including freedom of speech and assembly to petition and denounce to use internet to collect images and [information about] land petitions and big gatherings, to slander and publish wrong information on their personal Facebook to harm the reputation and weaken the confidence of the people for the Party and the State of Vietnam.

After completing [his 14 month](#) prison sentence, Do Nam Trung told [Radio Free Asia](#) that prison only made him stronger and more confident.

In addition to joining protests critical of the government, Do Nam Trung joined humanitarian groups providing help to victims of natural disasters, and publicly supported other activists including [Nguyen Van Dai](#), [Le Thu Ha](#), [Nguyen Huu Vinh](#), [Can Thi Theu](#), [Pham Doan Trang](#), and [Nguyen Thuy Hanh](#).

In the indictment dated October 26, the police wrote that Do Nam Trung did not acknowledge that he committed any crime, and did not write nor sign any documents.

The authorities frequently use Penal Code Article 117 to silence critics of the government and the Communist Party of Vietnam. In 2021 alone, courts convicted at least 18 people under this article and sentenced them to between 4 and 15 years in prison, including: Nguyen Tri Gioan (7 years); Tran Quoc Khanh (6 years, 6 months); Nguyen Van Lam (9 years); [Pham Chi Thanh](#) (5 years, 6 months); NLD Khanh (4 years); Cao Van Dung (9 years); Dang Hoang Minh (7 years); [Can Thi Theu](#) (8 years); [Trinh Ba Tu](#) (8 years); Tran Thi Tuyet Dieu (8 years); Nguyen Thi Cam Thuy (9 years); Ngo Thi Ha Phuong (7 years); Le Viet Hoa (5 years); Vu Tien Chi (10 years); [Dinh Thi Thu Thuy](#) (7 years); [Pham Chi Dung](#) (15 years); [Nguyen Tuong Thuy](#) (11 years); and [Le Huu Minh Tuan](#) (11 years).

During this time, police arrested at least 10 other people for violating Article 117: Le Van Quan, Dinh Van Hai, Nguyen Duy Linh, Bui Van Thuan, Tran Hoang Huan, Le Van Dung (also known as Le Dung Vova), Nguyen Bao Tien, Nguyen Thuy Hanh, Le Trong Hung, and Nguyen Duy Huong.

Stating opinions that contradict government propaganda is not a crime, Robertson said. The government and the Communist Party need to recognize that expressing ones opinions is a right guaranteed to everyone under both the Vietnamese constitution and international law.

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