

September 5, 2023

**Hon. Joseph R. Biden, Jr.**  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

**Re: A strategic partner of the US must praise and respect human rights**

Dear President Biden,

As you will be visiting Vietnam on September 10th to strengthen the strategic ties between the United States and Vietnam, we, the undersigned organizations, write to express our extreme concern about the human rights situation in Vietnam.

A strategic partnership between the two countries will contribute to protecting Vietnam. However, for this partnership to be beneficial in the long term for both peoples, it is essential that the two countries share a minimum of common values. Such as the absolute respect for democracy and human rights. Yet, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has openly disregarded these two values for decades.

For many years, Vietnam has used laws to imprison political opposition and to significantly restrict press freedom, as well as freedom of expression and right to information. Articles 117 (propaganda against the state) and 331 (abuse of democratic freedoms) of Vietnam's Penal Code are extensively employed to arrest anyone who dares to openly criticize the political actions of the regime.

In the last two years, even those who do not criticize the government have fallen victim to repression under false pretexts like tax evasion. Civil society figures such as Dang Dinh Bach, Mai Phan Loi, and Hoang Thi Minh Hong, who work in the field of protection of the environment, have been targeted due to their actions being perceived as inconvenient for the interests of the leaders.

Defense rights are also violated during pre-trial detention and trials, to such an extent that three famous human rights lawyers preferred to go into exile in the United States this year (Dang Dinh Manh, Nguyen Van Mieng and Dao Kim Lan) over being investigated and prosecuted as a retaliation for their legal defense work in their home country. A court has sentenced Dinh Thi Thu Thuy to seven years on 20 January 2021. The blogger had denounced the growing influence of China in Vietnam.

Detention conditions are also very bad with the death of certain prisoners of conscience in prison (Do Cong Duong, Phan Van Thu, Doan Dinh Nam) or internment in psychiatric hospitals (Le Anh Hung, Trinh Ba Phuong).

Regarding online freedom of expression and right to information, Vietnamese authorities continue to add more tools to their repressive legal arsenal. The 2019 cybersecurity law already provided significant powers to censor online information. Decrees 53 and 70 require internet companies to remove content deemed illegal under the cybersecurity law. In addition to the legal framework, Vietnamese authorities employ a cyber army, Force 47, and tens of thousands of trolls to spy on, denigrate, and harass those who criticize the government.

Although freedom of the press is enshrined in Article 25 of Vietnam's constitution, the regime has stepped up its crackdown on journalists and press freedom defenders in recent years. Harsh prison sentences have systematically been pronounced against independent journalists such as Pham Doan Trang, sentenced to nine years in 2021 for "anti-state propaganda", and the members of the Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam (IJAVN). As a result, Vietnam is currently the world's third largest captor of journalists and press freedom defenders, with at least 41 detained. The country ranks 178th out of 180 in the 2023 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index, its lowest position since the release of this index in 2002.

Repression within Vietnam and on the internet is no longer enough for the Vietnamese authorities; they are now conducting transnational repressions. Last April, Duong Van Thai, a Vietnamese dissident anti-corruption journalist who had taken refuge in Thailand, was abducted and taken to Vietnam where he awaits trial. This is the third case of kidnapping opponents outside Vietnamese territory. More recently, the Vietnamese police issued an arrest warrant for Le Van Son, an activist currently seeking political refuge in the United States.

Imprisoning dozens of prisoners of conscience, then releasing them slowly and expelling them from Vietnam due to international pressure cannot be the behavior of a strategic partner of the United States.

During your visit to Vietnam, we urge you to:

1. Pressure Vietnamese leaders to cease political persecutions against all individuals who have simply exercised their freedom of expression, revise repressive laws, including but not limited to articles 117 and 331 of the Penal Code and the Cybersecurity Law, end transnational repressions, and release all prisoners of conscience.
2. Pressure the Vietnamese regime to start respecting press freedom and the right to information, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Vietnam has ratified, and of the Vietnamese Constitution. Urge the regime to release all 41 journalists detained in connection with their reporting and stop abducting, arresting, detaining, mistreating, searching, and harassing journalists and press freedom defenders.
3. Address the cases of arbitrary investigations into activists, human rights defenders and journalists including: Pham Doan Trang, Le Dinh Luong, Nguyen Lan Thang, Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy, Nguyen Trung Ton, Truong Van Dung, Can Thi Theu, Trinh Ba Phuong, Trinh Ba Tu, Nguyen Nang Tinh, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc.

4. Meet with the families of these political prisoners to hear their testimonies about the human rights situation in Vietnam.

Yours sincerely,

ACAT France (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)

ACAT Belgium (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)

ACAT Germany (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)

ACAT Spain-Catalonia (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)

ACAT USA (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)

ARTICLE 19

Brotherhood For Democracy

COSUNAM - Swiss Vietnam Committee

Destination Justice

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)

Viet Tan

Mr. Jean-Daniel Vigny, member of the International Board of FIACAT

Ms Claire Doran, member of the International Board of FIACAT