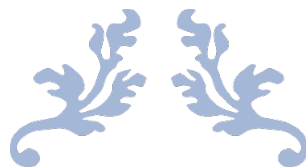





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BROTHERHOOD FOR DEMOCRACY



HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT VIETNAM

2024



Vietnam Human Rights Information Center 
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I. Introduction

Vietnam has experienced a turbulent political period since early 2024, marked by the rapid rise to power of Tô Lâm, who ascended from Minister of Public Security to President and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) within just a few months. His political advancement has granted unprecedented power and influence to the Ministry of Public Security while also leading to an increase in human rights violations in both frequency and severity.

At the beginning of 2024, a classified document titled Directive 24-CT/TW was leaked. Issued by the CPV Central Committee on July 19, 2023, the directive aimed to “ensure national security in the context of comprehensive and deep international integration”. Its core content focused on preventing “peaceful evolution” through enhanced surveillance of citizens and party members, as well as prohibiting the establishment of any political or social organizations. The revelation of this document drew significant attention from those concerned with human rights in Vietnam due to its sweeping implications for government policies. Indeed, many legal documents introduced in 2024 have reflected the influence of Directive 24, particularly in restricting citizens' rights and expanding the government's authority in surveillance and enforcement

Freedom of speech and religious freedom remained the two most heavily and systematically violated rights throughout the year. Additionally, certain indigenous groups in Vietnam faced increasing repression and suppression from the authorities.

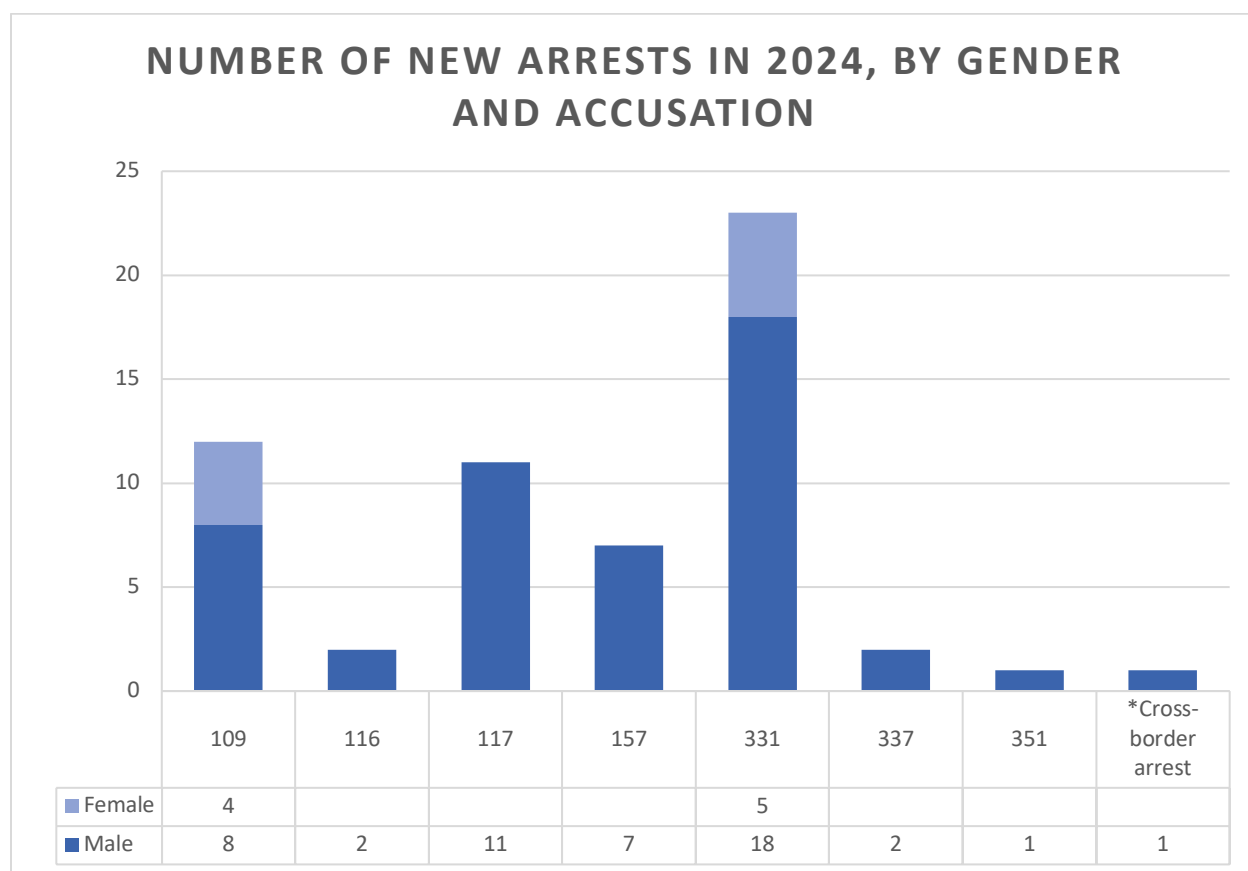
In 2024, the Vietnamese government prosecuted and arrested at least 59 people based on the exercise of their fundamental freedoms.¹. The most frequently used charges were “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state, the legitimate rights and interests of individuals and organizations” (Article 331 of the Penal Code) and “conducting propaganda against the state” (Article 117 of the Penal Code), under which a total of 34 people were arrested, while one person was prosecuted and placed under movement restrictions.

Twelve people were accused by the government of being members of the Provisional National Government of Vietnam (PNGVN) and arrested under charges of “activities aimed at overthrowing the government” (Article 109 of the Penal Code). Seven cases of Khmer monks and Buddhist followers were arrested for “illegal detaining others” (Article 157 of the Penal Code). One case was arrested for “insulting the national flag” (Article 351 of the 2015 Penal Code) after

¹Refer to Appendix 1

expressing dissenting political views by filming a video of burning the red flag and posting it on social media. Two Protestants in Dak Lak were arrested on charges of “undermining the great unity bloc” (Article 116 of the 2015 Penal Code).

The year 2024 also saw two arrests for “disclosing state secrets”, targeting progressive government officials advocating for labor rights, continuing the crackdown on NGOs that began in 2022. Additionally, the government intensified its transnational repression of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand, notably by pressuring Thai authorities to arrest Montagnard activist Y Quynh Bdap.



(*Data updated as of December 31, 2024)

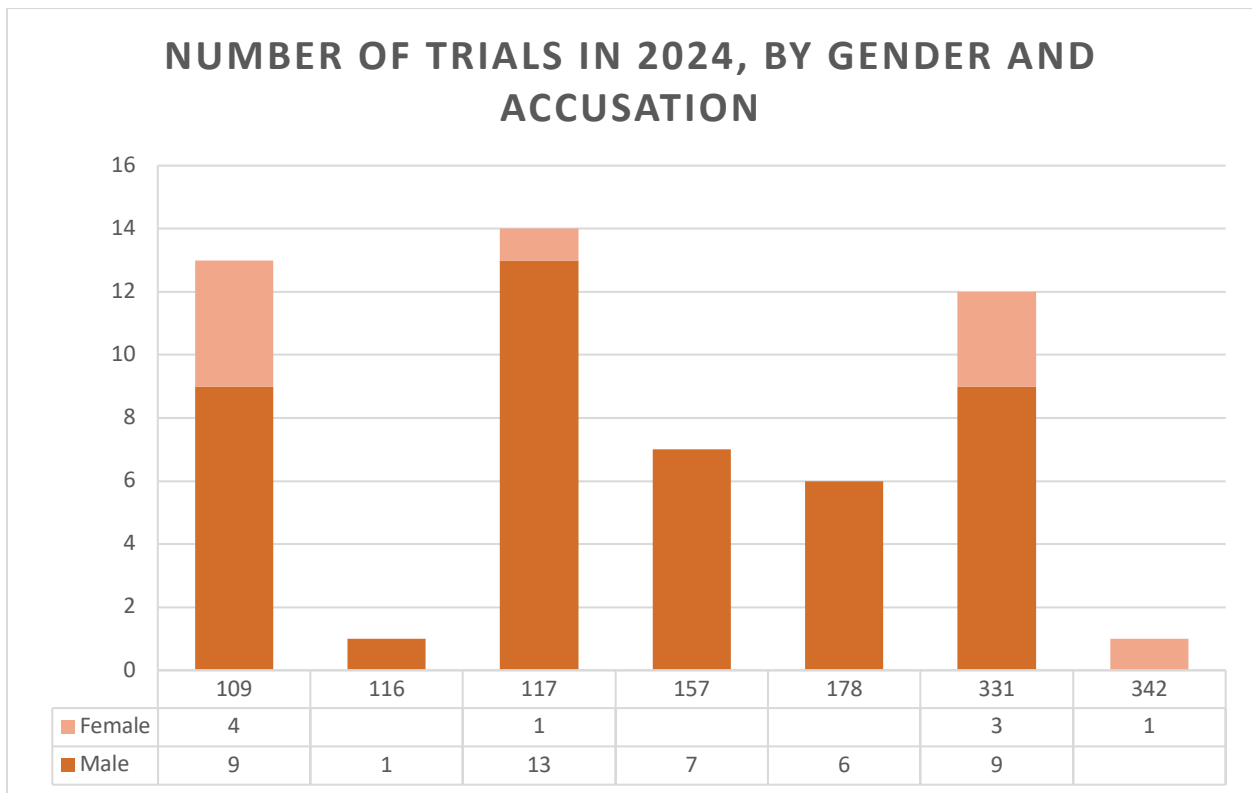
Also in 2024, at least 54 people were brought to trial in first-instance or appellate courts as part of a broader effort to suppress fundamental human rights². Among the 27 people prosecuted for anti-state propaganda or activities aimed at overthrowing the government, 11 were sentenced

²See Appendix 2

to prison terms ranging from 12 to 16 years. Twelve were convicted for abusing democratic freedoms, with sentences ranging from two to six years.

Seven cases of Khmer monks and Buddhists arrested on charges of “illegal detention” (Article 157) in March 2024 were tried after about seven months in pretrial detention. Six ethnic minorities in Dak Lak province were sentenced to five to seven years in prison for “destroying or intentionally damaging property” (Article 178) over a land dispute with an agricultural company.³

In addition, religious activist Y Krec Bya and environmental expert Ngo Thi To Nhien were also brought to trial on charges of “undermining the solidarity policy” (Article 116) and “appropriating, trading, or destroying seals and documents of an organization” (Article 342), respectively, constituting the only two recorded cases of persecution on the above two charges.



(*Data updated as of December 31, 2024)

This report will list the events and human rights violations that the drafting team has recorded in the period from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024. Within the limits of this report,

³ <https://phapluat.suckhoedoisong.vn/cac-doi-tuong-huy-hoai-tai-san-cong-ty-ca-phe-ea-pok-linh-an-59546.html>

the drafting team cannot cover all human rights, but can only focus on a few areas that, in our opinion, are the most prominent, providing an overview of human rights practices in Vietnam in 2024. These are: Freedom of speech; Freedom of religion; Human rights activists and prisoners of conscience; and Ethnic minorities.

The report is divided into 5 parts:

Part 1: Introduction to Vietnam's context and overview of the human rights situation in 2024

Part 2: Reporting methods

Part 3: Review of achievements and improvement efforts from the government

Part 4: List and analyze serious human rights violations by rights and issues groups.

Part 5: Conclusion

II. Methodology

In this report, the method of listing and statistics is mainly and consistently used. The report data is collected from 01/01/2024 to 31/12/2024, and this data is continuously reviewed and updated until the report is published on 01/01/2025.

The report provides in the appendix a specific list of people who have been prosecuted, arrested, and tried for exercising fundamental, inalienable human rights that Vietnam has recognized in both domestic and international forums. This list is based on information published in the press, so it may contain shortcomings.

Most of the cases and information in the report have been fully reported by domestic and international press, and can be easily verified. Some information provided by victims and their families will be noted.

Any comments, questions and queries regarding specific cases can be responded to the drafting team via email: information.humanrights@protonmail.com

III. Achievements in human rights practice

On May 7, 2024, Vietnam underwent its fourth-cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on human rights before the United Nations Human Rights Council. Out of 320 recommendations made by other countries to improve its human rights situation, Vietnam accepted 253 recommendations, partially accepted 18, and rejected 49.

In recent years, Vietnam has demonstrated a proactive approach in cooperating with the UPR mechanism, participating in full reviews and gradually increasing the number of recommendations it accepts in each cycle. Vietnam’s previous reviews took place in May 2009, February 2014, and January 2019. While further research is needed to assess the content of the recommendations and how Vietnam actually implements those it has accepted, the UPR is, in form, a relatively positive human rights mechanism for Vietnam. It provides a forum to scrutinize various human rights issues, including topics that the government typically avoids, such as proposals to establish a national human rights institution, ensuring a safe environment for human rights activists, and allowing public protests.

In 2024, we acknowledge the government's efforts to promote human rights education within the national education system by introducing human rights lessons for students from grades 1 to 12 across provinces and cities. Vietnam’s human rights education project was launched in 2017, aiming for 100% of educational institutions within the national education system to integrate human rights education by 2025. During 2022–2023, Vietnam developed training materials and curricula tailored to different educational levels and organized teacher training sessions on human rights education.

A preliminary review of the human rights education framework for elementary, middle, and high school students indicates that the program broadly covers fundamental human rights knowledge. Instead of being taught as a standalone subject, human rights concepts are integrated into multiple subjects and extracurricular activities, helping students recognize the comprehensive nature of human rights. However, the curriculum is knowledge-heavy, potentially placing pressure on both teachers and students. Furthermore, human rights remain a “politically sensitive” concept in mainstream discourse, and the curriculum follows a “rights come with responsibilities” approach. This could lead to interpretations that deviate from the original principles of rights, freedoms, and their implementation.

Regarding religion, on April 16, 2024, the Ministry of Home Affairs officially recognized the Vietnam United Gospel Outreach Church as a religious organization after more than 23 years of operation.⁴ This is only the second religious organization (after the Vietnam Full Gospel Church) to be granted official recognition by the Vietnamese government in more than four years.

⁴ <https://moha.gov.vn/so-lieu-thong-ke-nganh-noi-vu/thu-truong-bo-noi-vu-vu-chien-thang-trao-quyet-din-d891-t56019.html>

In 2021, Deputy Minister of Home Affairs Vũ Chiến Thắng stated that Vietnam welcomes all religions, including new ones. However, the number of recognized organizations remains limited due to the government's strict control policies.

Overall, Vietnam's positive human rights practices in 2024 remain relatively similar to previous years, primarily focused on international cooperation efforts. The much-anticipated Human Rights Education Project is expected to have a positive impact, but it will require more time before its actual effects on public awareness and human rights practices can be properly assessed.

IV. Outstanding human rights concerns and violations

1. Overview of Directive 24-CT/TW

Directive 24-CT/TW (Directive 24) of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) was issued on July 13, 2023, concerning “Ensuring National Security in the Context of Comprehensive and Deep International Integration”.⁵ This directive was leaked in early 2024 and immediately drew attention from human rights organizations and observers due to its direct implications for the CPV's human rights policies in the near future.

In general, Directive 24 instructs CPV members (who are effectively government officials and state employees) to prevent the formation of independent political organizations, control freedom of expression, restrict the dissemination of materials critical of the ruling party, suppress freedom of assembly, enhance citizen surveillance, and tighten control over independent labor unions. These issues have long been persistent human rights concerns in Vietnam, and Directive 24 reaffirms and systematizes repressive policies to ensure and maintain the Communist Party's political monopoly.

Regarding immigration and travel, the directive calls for strict control over CPV officials, government employees, and Vietnamese citizens traveling abroad for work, cooperation, exchanges, visits, or tourism (p.4). This regulation could create a strict surveillance and control mechanism over citizens, particularly those involved in civil society, human rights activism, and academia. The phrase “strict control” could lead to arbitrary travel restrictions, limiting citizens' right to movement without clear justification. Dissidents or individuals engaging in international

⁵ <https://the88project.org/vietnams-leaders-declare-war-on-human-rights/>

activities may be denied visas or placed under special surveillance when traveling abroad, restricting their academic, professional, and international cooperation opportunities.

As highlighted in previous annual reports, human rights activists and independent journalists in Vietnam are frequently barred from leaving the country or closely monitored when attending international human rights conferences. This prevents them from participating in global forums, restricting their freedom of expression and ability to engage in international discussions. In 2024, our research continues to confirm that a significant number of pro-democracy and human rights activists in Vietnam remain subject to travel bans under the vague justification of “national security”.

Regarding freedom of association, Directive 24 explicitly states that it “does not allow the formation of independent political organizations” (p.2) and “prevents the establishment of labor organizations based on ethnicity or religion” (p.4). This regulation affects not only political organizations but also civil society organizations, independent labor unions, human rights advocacy groups, and other non-governmental organizations. It has two significant implications. Firstly, it restricts the right to freedom of association, preventing citizens from forming independent organizations to protect their interests or participate in social activities. Political organizations or labor unions that are not state-controlled are classified as “anti-government” and are prohibited. Secondly, it leads to repression, psychological intimidation, and arrests of human rights activists. These human rights violations have been well-documented over the years, forming a persistent pattern of repression in the areas of religion and independent labor unions in Vietnam.

Regarding freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, Directive 24 mandates that the press must “fight against populist tendencies, civil disobedience, wrongful viewpoints, and sabotage by hostile forces” (p.5) and “prevent, promptly detect, and effectively combat all plots and activities of hostile, reactionary, and politically opposed forces” (p.6), including activities that incite protests and riots. This not only increases state control over the press but also strengthens censorship and suppression of individual voices. Articles or programs that do not conform to the government’s political framework—or are deemed inconsistent with the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV)'s policies—can be banned, deleted, subject to administrative penalties, or even criminal prosecution. Any individual can easily be accused of being “reactionary”, and protest participants may be labeled as hostile forces or traitors. This significantly restricts the right to assembly and fosters a climate of fear in society. Consequently, self-censorship becomes

widespread, as journalists, bloggers, and ordinary citizens may face threats, arrests, or prosecution for posting content deemed inappropriate by the government.

In addition, Vietnam's cyberspace is increasingly dominated by “cyber combat forces”, whose primary task is to attack and smear individuals with dissenting views against the government. When they cannot win an argument, they immediately label critics as “reactionary”. More severely, those who express critical opinions may be summoned for questioning by provincial or municipal security agencies. Depending on the perceived threat level, influence, and cooperation of the individual, authorities may impose different measures: the least severe being a warning, forcing them to delete their posts, and placing them under local surveillance—such as in the case of Chu Ngoc Quang Vinh in Yên Bái, who was summoned and warned after expressing dissatisfaction with the Communist Party.

More severe consequences include monetary fines based on Government Decree 15/2020/NĐ-CP on “Administrative Sanctions in the Fields of Post, Telecommunications, Radio Frequencies, Information Technology, and Electronic Transactions”, with an average fine of 7.5 million VND. If the individual continues their activities, they may be prosecuted under Article 331 or Article 117 of Vietnam’s Penal Code, with sentences ranging from six months to 20 years in prison. This creates an environment where individuals feel compelled to self-censor to avoid punishment. A notable example of this self-censorship is TikToker Lê Tuấn Khang, who won the “Most Voted” award at the TikTok Choice Award 2024. He stated, “If I believe that a video may be controversial or inappropriate, I will submit it to the cybersecurity authorities for review”.⁶ His statement reflects the prevailing fear of being scrutinized or targeted online, leading social media content creators to engage in preemptive self-censorship.

A key aspect of Directive 24 is its aim to prevent “peaceful evolution” during international cooperation and the reception of foreign funding. The directive mandates “strict management of activities of multinational corporations and foreign non-governmental organizations” and “control over international aid projects related to policy and law, rejecting foreign funding for legal development projects with complex and sensitive content while minimizing acceptance in other cases” (p.3). This measure is intended to prevent the exploitation of Vietnam’s international commitments and agreements to mobilize political opposition, promote “color revolutions”, and

⁶ <https://cafebiz.vn/tiktoker-le-tuan-khang chia-se-hau-truong-clip-chuc-trieu-view-tung-gui-video-cho-phong-an-ninh-mang-kiem-duyet-bien-ca-lang-thanh-dien-vien-17624113008275947.chn>

encourage “street revolutions”. As a result, NGOs and international aid organizations, particularly those working on human rights and civil-political freedoms, may face significant challenges in implementing their projects. The government may refuse to cooperate with these organizations or tightly control their activities. Since 2022, the Vietnamese government has increasingly cracked down on civil society, leading to the dissolution, suspension, or downsizing of numerous international and domestic NGOs. Additionally, despite the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) taking effect in 2020, the government has largely ignored its human rights commitments regarding labor and environmental protections. Meanwhile, activists and intellectuals advocating for labor rights and environmental issues have been arrested and sentenced to prison on tax evasion charges.

Another notable point in Directive 24 is its integration of economic, cultural, social, and foreign affairs with national defense and security (p.2). It emphasizes building a “people’s security posture” (p.5), particularly in residential communities, industrial zones, economic zones, and export processing zones, where large numbers of workers are concentrated. This perspective treats cultural, social, and diplomatic activities as potential national security threats that require strict surveillance, leading to the securitization of all sectors. It creates a comprehensive control environment where cultural exchanges and social activities by individuals and organizations may be restricted. Conferences, art performances, and social events involving individuals with dissenting views are closely monitored and regulated.

Although Directive 24-CT/TW is intended to strengthen national security management, its implementation negatively impacts fundamental rights in Vietnam, particularly personal freedoms, freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to protest, and the right to participate in social organizations. These restrictions weaken human rights and foster a tightly controlled political environment where critical voices and reform efforts have no room to develop.

Additionally, Directive 24 institutionalizes and legitimizes government surveillance, control, and repression—practices that were previously carried out without formal legal grounds. In other words, the government has long engaged in monitoring and restricting citizens, but these actions were unofficial and lacked a clear legal basis. Now, with Directive 24, these measures have been systematized, providing a foundation for future laws under the pretext of “ensuring national security” and suppressing dissenting and opposing voices.

2. Freedom of speech

2.1. Information censorship policy

Vietnam's National Report at the 2024 UPR Review claims that the country's media operates freely, with no pre-publication censorship of press and publishing activities.⁷

However, in reality, Vietnam considers the press as the mouthpiece of Party bodies, state agencies, and socio-political organizations, as stated in Article 4 of the 2016 Press Law. According to this law, only state agencies, socio-political-professional organizations, and recognized religious organizations have the right to establish press agencies, while private media is entirely prohibited. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) maintains strict control over media outlets through the "Regulations on Responsibilities, Powers, Appointment, Dismissal, Reward, and Discipline of Press Agency Leaders", issued in 2023. These regulations establish that media oversight at the central level falls under the Central Propaganda Department, while at the local level, it is managed by provincial propaganda departments. Furthermore, leaders of press agencies must be Party members with advanced political training. As a result, Vietnam's mainstream media is far from independent.

The 2018 Cybersecurity Law, along with decrees on administrative penalties for sharing information online, has become an effective legal tool for the Vietnamese government to suppress independent information-sharing efforts. Individuals who make statements or share content deemed inappropriate by the government for the first time or at low frequency may be summoned and fined up to 7.5 million VND (approximately 300 USD). These legal instruments also apply to social media platforms and companies operating on these platforms, as the government prohibits businesses from advertising on content it considers "illegal". This regulation forces companies to proactively monitor advertising placements to avoid penalties. In May 2024, an enterprise was fined 15 million VND under this regulation after an advertising company was penalized for placing a client's product advertisement on a YouTube channel that allegedly distorted and defamed the Party and state leaders, according to Article 8(1) of the 2018 Cybersecurity Law.⁸

In addition, On November 9, 2024, the Vietnamese government issued Decree No. 147/2024/NĐ-CP on the management, provision, and use of internet services and online

⁷ Vietnam National Report for 4th UPR cycle, A/HRC/WG.6/46/VNM/, 2024, para. 45
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/029/50/pdf/g2402950.pdf>

⁸VietnamNet, <https://vietnamnet.vn/xu-phat-cong-ty-tnhh-inverse-media-do-vi-pham-ve-quang-cao-2283677.html>

information, replacing the previous Decree No. 72/2013/NĐ-CP and Decree No. 27/2018/NĐ-CP. Notably, while Decrees 72 and 27 primarily focused on regulations related to social media, electronic information sites, and the management of online gaming services, the introduction of Decree 147 brings new and concerning provisions. These include a requirement for cross-border information service providers and social media platforms to verify the identities of their users. Account verification is carried out by linking to a mobile phone number registered in Vietnam or a personal identification number. Users who do not verify their accounts will be restricted from sharing content on social media, including posting, commenting, and livestreaming. While this measure has received significant support from regulators, it has raised concerns among users about the further erosion of the already limited freedoms of Vietnamese citizens.

On the first aspect, the mandatory social media account verification under Decree 147/2024/NĐ-CP raises serious concerns about violations of personal privacy. This concern stems from the fact that account verification often requires users to provide personal information such as phone numbers, national ID cards, or even biometric data. This creates a significant risk of privacy infringement, especially given the frequent leaks and misuse of Vietnamese citizens' personal data for unclear or unauthorized purposes, despite the legal data protection measures introduced in recent years.

Moreover, requiring account verification could establish a mechanism for tracking users' online activities, making it difficult for those who need anonymity, such as human rights activists, journalists, or social advocates. Government agencies could easily trace users' posts, comments, and online behavior through their verified personal information. This creates an unsafe environment, exposing individuals to potential threats from state authorities or powerful interest groups facing criticism.

On the other hand, Decree 147 shifts the responsibility for monitoring, preventing, and reporting cybersecurity violations onto telecommunications companies and social media service providers (collectively referred to as “companies”). The decree requires companies to proactively enforce management responsibilities, such as monitoring, filtering, and removing content that violates the Cybersecurity Law and immediately reporting users and information suspected of legal violations to the authorities. Companies must also store data on all users from Vietnam, including foreign users, and require social media users to verify their identities before they can post, livestream, or comment. Article 79 requires companies to provide data information with signs of

violating the law to be able to accurately identify individuals and organizations that violate the law at the request of the authorities. Previously, social media platforms only needed to block content upon requests from the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) or the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). However, under Decree 147, they must now actively identify content that violates the Cybersecurity Law and report it to the government to avoid administrative penalties.

Additionally, Clause 4, Article 24 stipulates that “electronic information sites... are responsible for preventing and removing illegal content, services, and applications no later than 24 hours after receiving a request via phone call, written document, or electronic means”. This provision raises serious concerns as it legitimizes verbal directives from state authorities, making it difficult for users to appeal content moderation decisions if their posts are deleted or their accounts are suspended or removed. The decree also expands the authority to block information beyond the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) to include provincial-level Departments of Information and Communications and other competent agencies. This means that if there is negative information related to local healthcare issues, the local Department of Health can directly request social media platforms and information sites to remove related posts instead of filing a complaint with cybersecurity authorities as before. Meanwhile, the decree barely addresses the rights of internet users to appeal content takedown or administrative penalties, nor does it recognize the risk of identity theft being used to commit crimes. Furthermore, international human rights organizations have repeatedly pointed out that Vietnam’s legal provisions on cybersecurity, national security threats, and violations of individual and organizational rights are overly broad and vague. These laws fail to distinguish between exercising fundamental freedoms—such as freedom of speech and press freedom—and actual violations, making anyone potentially susceptible to legal punishment.

Decree 147 officially took effect on December 25, 2024. However, as of the end of January 2025, social media users on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Google services in Vietnam were still able to post, comment, and livestream without account verification. It remains unclear how international companies will comply with Decree 147, as its regulations may conflict with global community values and international legal standards. Nevertheless, this decree has already materialized a key aspect of Directive 24 by tightening speech control. It has effectively imposed strict constraints, compelling both internet users in Vietnam and international companies to engage in self-censorship.

In February 2024, the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Information and Communications introduced the SocialBeat software—an AI-powered social media monitoring tool. According to the department, SocialBeat integrates artificial intelligence (AI) to collect data from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and others. The software is expected to help authorities in Ho Chi Minh City gain comprehensive insights into public opinion, social trends, and online discussions. A significant aspect of this technology is its capability to track and analyze “the flow of information from hostile forces and anti-government groups that exploit social media and online platforms to incite protests against the government and its policies”..⁹

These legal policies, combined with advanced surveillance technologies, have further solidified the implementation of Directive 24 in controlling online speech. As a result, they have successfully established a rigid mechanism that compels Vietnamese citizens—and even foreign residents in Vietnam—to engage in self-censorship. The last remaining space for freedom of expression in Vietnam is shrinking at an alarming rate.

2.2. Violations of freedom of speech

With the legal tools analyzed above, the Vietnamese government in 2024 intensified its crackdown on any efforts to provide and share diverse perspectives across various fields. Notable cases include:

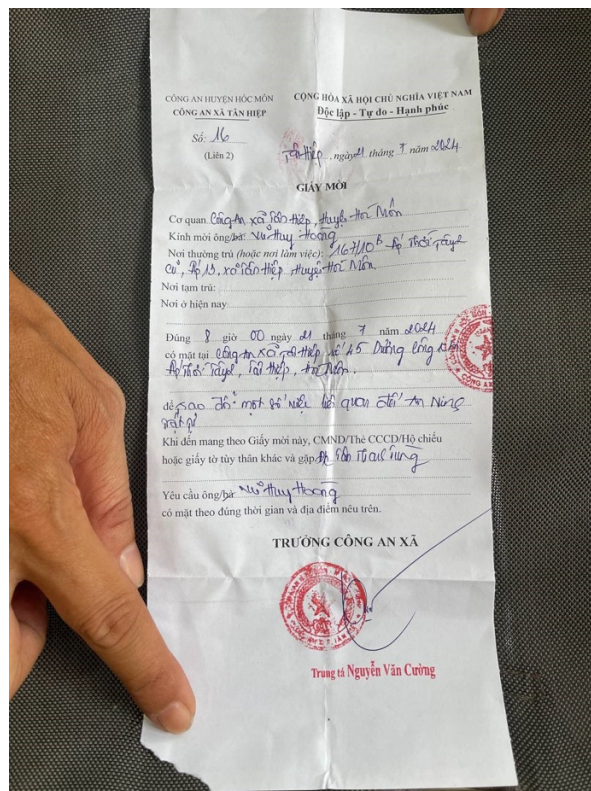
- On February 9, 2024, a journalist from the *Environmental Industry Magazine* was fined 4 million VND after investigating a government vehicle (bearing blue license plates) from the Ha Tinh Provincial Women’s Union that was using priority sirens and lights to pick up a relative at the airport. The journalist was penalized for “engaging in journalistic activities inconsistent with the stated mission and purpose outlined in the media organization’s press license”..¹⁰
- On June 26, 2024, a Facebook user, T.D.T, was fined 7.5 million VND for allegedly posting articles that “defamed and insulted the reputation of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha”. His posts compared the spiritual path of Buddhist monk Thích Minh Tuệ to that of certain monks within the official Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, criticizing the government’s interference in Thích Minh Tuệ’s choice of religious practice. Despite

⁹ <https://thanhnien.vn/phan-mem-lang-nghe-mang-xa-hoi-cua-tphcm-hoat-dong-ra-sao-185240227225036585.htm>

¹⁰ <https://nld.com.vn/mot-phong-vien-bi-phat-4-trieu-dong-vi-hoat-dong-khong-dung-ton-chi-muc-dich-196240209142346155.htm>

the acknowledgment by both the Buddhist Sangha and government that many Buddhist monks exist outside official institutions, authorities still penalized T.D.T for his online comments..¹¹

- In July and August 2024, the government fined at least seven individuals across multiple provinces for “spreading false, fabricated, and distorted information that denies the great contributions and achievements of General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng”. These individuals faced fines ranging from 5 million to 7.5 million VND. Many Facebook posts expressing dissenting opinions about the late General Secretary’s policies were either blocked from view in Vietnam or removed entirely. Additionally, numerous political dissidents in Vietnam were summoned and interrogated by the police. One individual, speaking to Radio Free Asia (RFA), reported being beaten and coerced into making a confession during questioning by law enforcement..¹²



Activist Vu Huy Hoang in Hoc Mon, Ho Chi Minh City was summoned and fined 7.5 million VND on July 21, 2024, during the funeral of Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong.

¹¹ https://congan.dongthap.gov.vn/chi-tiet-bai-viet/-/asset_publisher/wbj7qfWZntAi/content/id/19554330

¹² <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/vietnam-intensifies-online-suppression-ahead-of-communist-leader-funeral-07232024051709.html>

In addition to administrative fines, the Vietnamese government frequently imposes prison sentences to suppress those who persistently express dissenting opinions. Among the 59 new prisoners of conscience prosecuted in 2024, 23 individuals were arrested under Article 331 of the Penal Code for “abusing democratic freedoms” simply for peacefully exercising their right to free expression on social media—conduct that falls within the boundaries of free speech under international human rights principles. Among these cases, the arrests of Lê Thị Hoà and Nguyễn Văn Trong in Phú Yên province exemplify the severe abuse of power by authorities in applying Article 331. The couple disagreed with a court ruling and suspected corruption. From 2022 to 2024, they filed multiple complaints and denunciations to various government agencies, from the district level to the central government. The Sơn Hoà District Police Investigation Agency accused them of spreading false complaints that allegedly damaged the reputations of officials and government leaders.¹³ According to media reports, Hoà and Trong did not post on social media or organize protests—they merely exercised their legal right to petition and denounce misconduct when they disagreed with an administrative decision. Despite this, the authorities prosecuted and detained the couple, setting a dangerous precedent for the suppression of citizens who file complaints against government officials and agencies.

Another example of the misuse of Article 331 to silence individuals is the case of lawyer Bùi Văn Khang. According to VnExpress, Khang participated in legal discussions and consultations on the YouTube channel “Tiếng Nói Lòng Dân” (The People's Voice), founded by Phan Ngọc Dung, from October 2021 to January 2024. On this channel, Khang commented on the Hồ Duy Hải case and made statements that the government deemed as “distorting the truth, slandering, and insulting the reputation and dignity of the Supreme People's Court and its leadership, as well as the national leadership, causing negative social impact”.¹⁴ The Hồ Duy Hải case remains highly controversial due to numerous procedural and investigative violations. Punishing a lawyer for merely disagreeing with a court ruling is a clear violation of freedom of speech, demonstrating the government's intolerance of any form of public legal scrutiny.

In contrast, the government has tolerated and even encouraged attacks on individuals and organizations in the name of extreme nationalism and party loyalty.

¹³ <https://nhandan.vn/khoi-to-bat-giam-2-vo-chong-lam-104-don-khieu-nai-to-cao-can-bo-sai-su-that-post834807.html>

¹⁴ <https://vnexpress.net/luat-su-bi-phat-tu-vi-xuc-pham-lanh-dao-tand-toi-cao-4789108.html>

A striking example is the case of a 12th-grade student in Yên Bái who faced online harassment and public exposure of personal information after posting a Facebook story expressing non-affection toward the Communist Party. The student's identity and private details were widely shared by media outlets and social media users, accompanied by derogatory comments. Instead of addressing this violation of privacy, the Yên Bái provincial police summoned the student, their parents, and the homeroom teacher for an ideological “re-education” session to make the student “recognize the Party’s role”.¹⁵ Meanwhile, authorities took no action to protect the student's personal information from being leaked and mocked online.

Another target of extreme nationalist attacks was Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV)—a higher education institution established under a U.S.-Vietnam intergovernmental agreement. Starting in August 2024, Facebook pages linked to the Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense and Ministry of Public Security cyber units, such as Tisofì and Đơn vị Tác chiến Điện tử, began accusing FUV of being a “color revolution training ground”. These allegations focused on symbolic events like the absence of the Vietnamese national flag during graduation ceremonies and the use of a “Fearless” flag instead. Such claims were later echoed in a televised special report titled “No Color Revolution in Education”, aired by the Vietnam National Defense Television (QPVN)—a station under the Ministry of National Defense. On August 26, 2024, a Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson reaffirmed that FUV is a product of U.S.-Vietnam educational cooperation, highlighting its role in high-quality human resource training. The spokesperson expressed confidence that FUV's activities would continue strengthening Vietnam-U.S. relations.¹⁶ Following this statement, the QPVN report was quietly removed from the channel’s official platforms without any official explanation. However, the video remains widely shared on social media, particularly on district-level government pages and pro-military online communities, including groups linked to the Cyber Warfare Unit AK47 of the Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense.

¹⁵ <https://www.nguoiduatin.vn/tin-moi-vu-nam-sinh-yen-bai-viet-bai-co-noi-dung-chua-phu-hop-tren-mang-xa-hoi-204240903085449172.htm>

¹⁶ <https://baochinhphu.vn/nguoi-phat-ngon-bo-ngoai-Giao-len-tieng-ve-hoat-dong-cua-truong-fulbright-viet-nam-102240826224303093.htm>



The image of the Fulbright graduation ceremony without the red flag with yellow star was used in the video of the Vietnam National Defense Television as a manifestation of color revolution (QPVN)

3. Freedom of religion

According to Vietnam's 2024 UPR National Report, 95% of the population follows or practices some form of faith or religion, with nearly 30,000 places of worship across the country. The government recognizes 43 organizations representing 16 religious sects, while more than 3,700 religious groups have been granted permits to operate. Additionally, there are 62 religious training institutions covering major religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Caodaism, and Hòa Hảo Buddhism.¹⁷

In practice, many religious groups are excluded from these statistics because they lack government recognition and registration. These unregistered groups are often the main targets of religious persecution in Vietnam.

¹⁷Viet Nam National Report to the Fourth Universal Periodic Review of the UPR, A/HRC/WG.6/46/VNM/1, 22 February 2024, paras. 52-54.

The Vietnamese government restricts religious practice through legal regulations, mandatory registration, and government intervention in religious affairs. The 2016 Law on Belief and Religion establishes a multi-step approval process, ensuring that religious groups remain dependent on state approval. First, religious organizations must have government recognition to operate legally (Article 2.12 and Chapter V, Section 1); second, all religious activities must be registered, which means they must apply for permission, but permission can be denied (Chapter IV); and third, the government continues to have the right to interfere in the internal activities of religions, especially in the selection, ordination, and appointment of clergy (Chapter V, Sections 2 and 3). These restrictions violate international human rights standards outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)—both of which Vietnam has pledged to uphold. Based on the letter of the law, The state selectively grants recognition to a limited number of religious groups while outlawing long-established independent religious communities such as the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Pure Hòa Hảo Buddhism, and Chon Truyền Caodaism.

Following the violent conflict between ethnic minorities and the government in Đắk Lắk in June 2023, the 2024 religious crackdown has intensified against independent religious groups in ethnic minority regions, particularly in the Northwest, Central Highlands, and Mekong Delta.

3.1. Buddhism

Buddhist practitioner Thich Minh Tue and the Sangha follow the ascetic practice

According to the 2023 report by the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, Buddhism is one of the largest religions in Vietnam, with the second-largest number of followers in the country. Approximately 4.6 million people identify as Buddhists, making up 4.8% of the population.¹⁸ Buddhism also has one of the highest numbers of religious institutions and places of worship among recognized religions in Vietnam.

At the top of the state-recognized Buddhist institutions is the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), established in 1981 as the official governing body for Buddhism nationwide. The VBS operates under the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics, effectively serving as an extension of the government’s control over Buddhist religious activities. Any Buddhist organizations, temples, or monks that do not join the VBS are deemed

¹⁸ <https://baochinhphu.vn/cong-bo-ket-qua-chinh-thuc-va-tong-ket-tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-nha-o-nam-2019-102265875.htm>

illegitimate and, in many cases, face suppression—as seen with the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), Tịnh Thất Bồng Lai, and more recently, the case of Thích Minh Tuệ.

In early 2024, religious life in Vietnam welcomed a new figure, Thich Minh Tue, a Buddhist practitioner following the strict ascetic practice of the 13 Dhutanga practices. Following the 13 precepts of asceticism, he only accepts alms of drinking water for one day and enough food for one meal, wears a patched-up monk's robe made from discarded cloth, refuses to accept money, and preaches the Dharma while practicing strict renunciation. Thich Minh Tue's ascetic lifestyle starkly contrasts with the image of many monks in state-affiliated temples, which often cater to government officials and high-ranking leaders. This contrast garnered widespread public admiration, transforming an unknown mendicant monk into a national sensation. Starting as a solitary ascetic, Thích Minh Tuệ soon attracted thousands of followers. People gathered along the roads to see, venerate, and offer alms to him. Among his admirers, many were so inspired that they shaved their heads, donned monastic robes, and followed him with rice cookers in hand, forming a spontaneous ascetic monastic community.

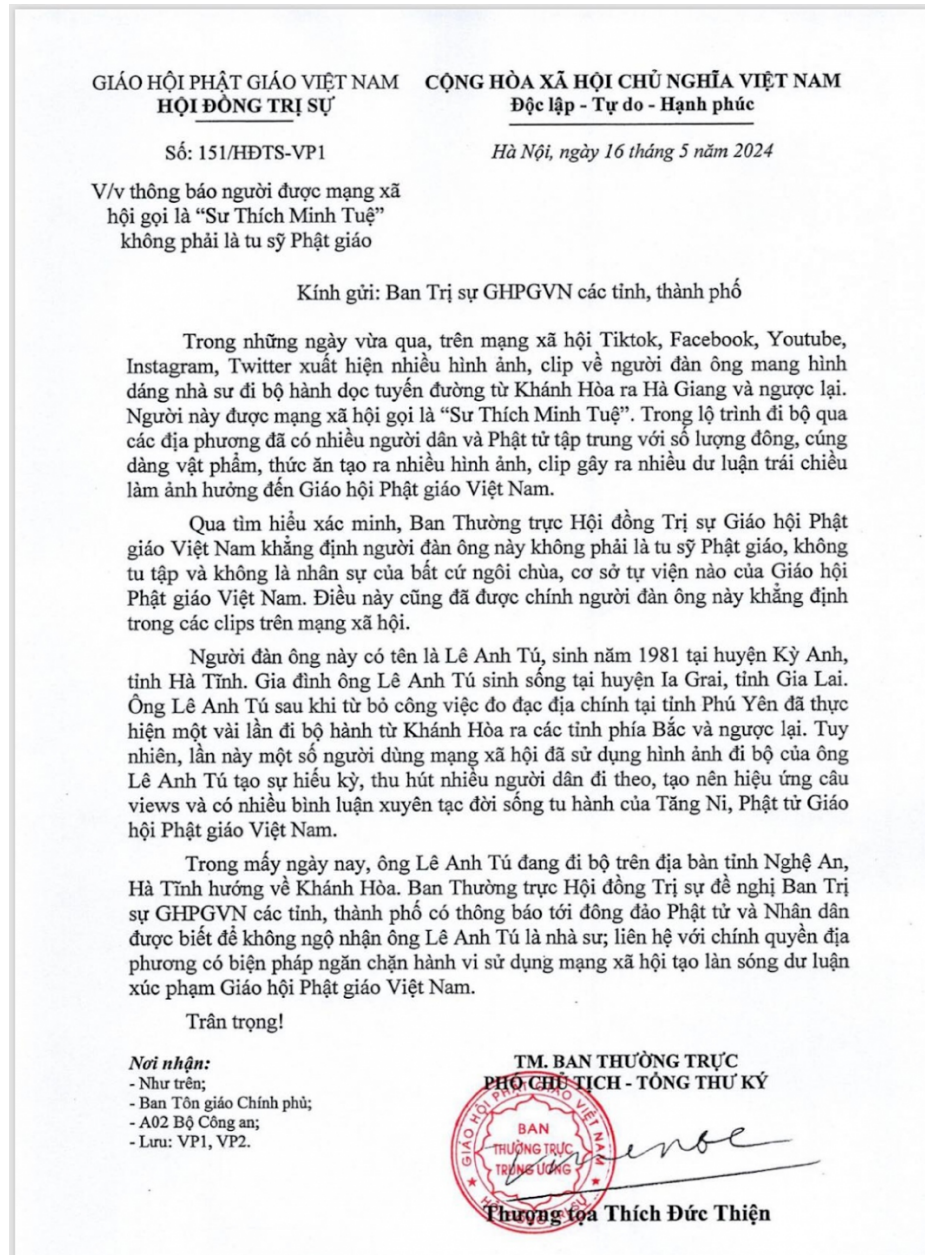
Contrary to the people's support, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha issued a document denying that Thích Minh Tuệ was a Buddhist monk. They ordered Buddhist clergy and followers nationwide to prevent people from mistakenly recognizing him as a legitimate monk, arguing that he was tarnishing the image of Buddhism.^{19 20} This exclusive doctrinal stance angered many Buddhist followers, further increasing public dissatisfaction with state-controlled Buddhism. As a result, the number of people choosing to follow Thích Minh Tuệ grew to approximately 70 individuals. In response, the government mobilized security forces to raid the ascetic group at night, forcibly separating them into smaller groups and sending them to different provinces. Thích Minh Tuệ himself was taken away and subsequently went missing, with authorities claiming that he had chosen seclusion for meditation. Many monks who had accompanied him were later interrogated by police and prohibited from continuing their ascetic practice.

Thích Minh Tuệ's real name is Lê Anh Tú, born in 1981. In 2015, Mr. Tu asked his family to become a monk and was given the dharma name Thich Minh Tue. However, Mr. Minh Tue later

¹⁹ <https://thanhvien.vn/Giao-hoi-phat-Giao-viet-nam-su-thich-minh-tue-khong-phai-la-tu-si-phat-Giao-185240516191805658.htm>

²⁰ <https://btgcp.gov.vn/tin-hoat-dong-cua-ban-ton-Giao-chinh-phu/ban-ton-Giao-chinh-phu-thong-tin-ve-nguoi-tu-xung-la-thich-minh-tue-postPvRjk3KajW.html>

left the pagoda, choosing the Buddhist mendicant lifestyle, also known as the Dhutanga (ascetic) practice, and has retained this dharma name to this day. When he rose to public prominence, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) issued a statement asserting that he was not a recognized Buddhist monk under their organization. However, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), a longstanding and independent Buddhist organization, affirmed his legitimacy, stating: "As long as Thích Minh Tuệ lives and practices according to the Buddha's teachings, he is a true Buddhist monk".



VBS document in May 2024 denying that Mr Thích Minh Tue was a monk

The case of Monk Minh Tuệ and his ascetic monastic community originally involved a common religious practice but became the target of government intervention starting in May 2024. The interference violated freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and freedom of residence, beginning with the following actions:

- May 16, 2024: The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) and the Government Committee for Religious Affairs issued a statement denying Minh Tuệ's status as a Buddhist monk and warning against the so-called “Minh Tuệ phenomenon”.
- May 29, 2024: The chairman of a commune in Quảng Trị province denied Minh Tuệ and his monastic group permission to rest at a local cemetery.
- June 3, 2024: In Thừa Thiên Huế province, authorities—including local government officials and police forces—blocked the monastic group from entering Huế city, citing traffic safety concerns, as nearly a thousand people had gathered ahead to witness the alms-round procession. Instead, officials rerouted the ascetic group to an alternative route (Tứ Hạ – Phú Bài) and secretly dispersed them at night. Following this crackdown, members of the monastic group were forcibly transported back to their hometowns, split between northern and southern provinces, and abandoned in scattered locations along the way. Meanwhile, Minh Tuệ appeared in state-controlled media, assisted by security agencies in obtaining an ID card, and announced a temporary suspension of his alms practice. Shortly thereafter, he was taken to an undisclosed location and disappeared from public view for an extended period. This severely violated the fundamental rights to religious freedom and movement.
- In mid-June 2024, reports emerged that Minh Tuệ was in hiding in Gia Lai province, residing in a small hut on his family's coffee farm. However, authorities—including local police and civil defense forces—set up checkpoints on access roads leading to the location, preventing people from visiting. Many curious individuals and YouTubers attempted to reach Minh Tuệ, but he vanished from both his parents' home and the rumored retreat site.
- In July and November 2024, there was a series of images and videos showing Minh Tuệ resuming his alms rounds—but only within a limited area near his alleged retreat in Gia Lai. However, a group of uniformed security personnel closely surrounded him,

- restricting public interaction and limiting direct contact. His alms rounds lasted no more than two hours at a time.
- On November 13, 2024, Gia Lai Newspaper published a letter, allegedly written by Minh Tuệ on November 8, addressed to government authorities, his family, and the public. The letter contained two main points: (1) urging people not to gather in large crowds to avoid causing public disorder or traffic disruptions and asking them not to take photos or videos of him, and (2) requesting authorities to take action against individuals posting information about him on social media without his consent.²¹ A few days later, several other newspapers continued to publish two handwritten letters by Mr. Minh Tue, one of which dated November 17 announced that he would stop his alms practice because of “complex social and political security conditions that are not conducive to practicing the ascetic path”, and the other dated November 26 expressed Minh Tuệ’s wish to undertake a pilgrimage on foot from Vietnam to India—the birthplace of Buddha.²²
 - On December 12, Thích Minh Tuệ commenced his pilgrimage from Bờ Y Border Gate at the Vietnam–Laos border, accompanied by five others. Among them was Dr. Đoàn Văn Báu, a former lieutenant colonel and lecturer in psychology at the People's Security Academy.

²¹ <https://baogialai.com.vn/ong-minh-tue-de-ngghi-khong-dua-hinh-anh-cua-ong-len-mang-xa-hoi-post300888.html?ref=luatkhoa.com>

²² <https://www.luatkhoa.com/2024/11/luat-khoa-360-thich-minh-tue-va-3-buc-tam-thu-gay-chu-y/>



Monk Thich Minh Tue (Source: VnExpress)

There would be nothing unusual about this case, and it could simply be regarded as an individual's free decision, if not for the appearance of a handwritten letter allegedly written by Thích Minh Tuệ, despite the lack of any video interviews with the press or the public for an extended period. Additionally, the letter dated November 8 contained a request for authorities to take action against those filming or photographing Thích Minh Tuệ without his permission. This demand clearly contradicts the Buddhist principle of “letting go”, which Minh Tuệ had consistently demonstrated throughout his practice. These events highlight the serious risk of government intervention infringing upon fundamental rights—in this case, Thích Minh Tuệ's rights to freedom of movement, residence, and religious practice.

Furthermore, at least one Buddhist monk has faced discrimination for publicly supporting Thích Minh Tuệ and the 13 ascetic practices—Venerable Thích Minh Đạo, abbot of Minh Đạo Monastery in Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu province. In May 2024, the provincial Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) authorities reprimanded him after he posted a video praising Thích Minh Tuệ. On August 12, 2024, Venerable Thích Minh Đạo, a member of the VBS, announced his decision to leave monastic life, formally returning his monk's robe, alms bowl, monastic certificate, and Buddhist studies diploma. Despite leaving the VBS, he stated his intention to continue practicing and

following Thích Minh Tuệ's path. Just two weeks later, the Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu Provincial Standing Committee of VBS issued a written request to the Phú Mỹ Town People's Committee and the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs to review the legal status of Minh Đạo Monastery's child care and sponsorship activities, which had been ongoing since 2000. On October 11, 2024, the children cared for by Minh Đạo Monastery were removed and placed in the Provincial Social Work and Child Protection Center, citing the monastery's lack of official state approval for its social assistance operations.²³

Khmer Buddhism

In March 2024, authorities in Tam Bình District, Vĩnh Long Province arrested nine individuals, including monks and followers of Đại Thọ Pagoda, a Khmer Buddhist temple, on charges of “anti-state propaganda” and “illegal detention”. The police accused these individuals of restraining a working delegation from the Tam Bình District People's Committee, locking them inside the temple's main hall, and physically assaulting and injuring them on November 22, 2023, when the delegation visited Đại Thọ Pagoda. However, according to the Khmer Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF), an organization advocating for Khmer Krom rights across multiple countries, the Vietnamese authorities had come to Đại Thọ Pagoda to shut down a Khmer language class held at the temple. This led to a scuffle, during which the temple's abbot, Trạch Chanh Ra Đa, and two other Buddhist followers were injured.²⁴

On November 26, 2024, the People's Court of Vĩnh Long province sentenced 9 people arrested at Đại Thọ pagoda to a total of 27 years and 3 months in prison under Article 331 of the 2015 Penal Code (“abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, organizations, and individuals”) and Article 157 (“illegal detention”). The trial raised serious concerns regarding access to justice for the detained individuals, as the entire trial lasted only one day (November 26), and only one court-appointed lawyer was assigned to defend all nine accused individuals.

A relative of one of the detained monk told Radio Free Asia that: “During the trial, almost all the defendants showed strange behaviors, as if they had been drugged. They looked dazed and unresponsive when they saw their family members. Some couldn't even speak when questioned

²³ <https://baobariavungtau.com.vn/xa-hoi/202410/tiep-nhan-nuoi-duong-37-tre-em-tu-tu-vien-minh-dao-va-tinh-xa-ngoc-lam-1023446/index.htm>

²⁴ <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/11/23/press/6123/article.htm>

by the lawyer. They walked unsteadily and appeared weak when sitting. Monk Kim Sa Ruong nearly collapsed, but the police caught him in time”.²⁵.

Given these signs, it is highly likely that the nine individuals were detained under inhumane conditions, possibly subjected to coercion and mistreatment, which may have resulted in physical and mental deterioration, preventing them from properly defending themselves in court.



*Monks and followers of Đại Thọ Pagoda at the first instance trial on November 26, 2024
(Source: Nhan Dan Online Newspaper)*

Buddhist followers at Dai Tho Pagoda and monks have faced constant harassment from the government since 2022, when the government wanted to cut down a 700-year-old tree in the pagoda territory, as well as prevent monks from practicing alms in the neighborhood.

The Khmer people are an indigenous ethnic group in the Mekong Delta region, which includes both Vietnam and Cambodia. In Vietnam, the Khmer primarily reside in the Southwest region, mainly in the provinces of Trà Vinh, Kiên Giang, and Sóc Trăng. They have their own language and script and practice Theravāda Buddhism. Many Khmer Buddhist institutions operate independently of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha or the Solidarity Association of Patriotic Monks (Hội Đoàn kết Sư sãi Yêu nước – HĐKSSYN), both state-controlled organizations. As a result, these independent religious institutions frequently face government repression.

²⁵ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamese-government-condemned-for-imprisoning-nine-khmer-krom-buddhist-monks-and-activists-11272024052536.html>

In March 2024, the Solidarity Association of Patriotic Monks in Trà Vinh Province issued a decision expelling Kim Som Rinh from the Theravāda Buddhist Sangha of Trà Vinh Province, expelling him from the pagoda where he was practicing, and banning all 143 Khmer pagodas in the province from accepting him. According to the decision, Mr. Kim Som Rinh did not comply with the invitation of the Solidarity Association of Patriotic Monks in Trà Vinh Province three times; posted and shared false images and videos on Facebook with content that allegedly caused public disorder; enticed a number of monks and Buddhists to participate in his activities, causing division within temples and communities; and that Mr. Kim Som Rinh was “disobedient and stubborn”, refusing to follow monastic rules and instructions from temple leaders and higher authorities. However, Kim Som Rinh refuted these accusations, claiming that he was expelled because of his human rights advocacy and his outspoken support for marginalized communities, including Khmer victims of land confiscation in Kiên Giang province.²⁶

3.2. Catholicism

According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census, Catholicism is the largest religious group in Vietnam. With nearly 6 million followers, Catholics make up 44.6% of all religious adherents and approximately 6% of the total population.²⁷ Vietnam also ranks as the fifth-largest Catholic population in Asia, after Timor-Leste, the Philippines, South Korea, and Lebanon.

After 1954, with the Geneva Agreement, millions of Northern Vietnamese Catholics, including priests, religious figures, and laypeople, migrated to the South. A small number of clergy and laypeople remained in the North to protect church properties. However, with the Communist Party taking control and its determination to build a socialist system in the North, many Catholic properties were seized by the government—a situation that remains unresolved today. Between 1954 and April 30, 1975, Catholicism developed in starkly different ways in North and South Vietnam.

In the North, Catholics suffered persecution, especially during the Land Reform Campaign, where they were subjected to public denunciation, civil rights restrictions, and limitations on religious practice. The suppression of Catholicism in the North was part of a larger effort to

²⁶ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/vietnamese-authorities-increase-suppression-against-khmer-human-rights-activists-05302024031455.html>

²⁷ <https://baochinhphu.vn/cong-bo-ket-qua-chinh-thuc-va-tong-ket-tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-nha-o-nam-2019-102265875.htm>

eliminate religious institutions. Monks and priests were restricted from freely practicing their faith, while church properties were confiscated, repurposed, or even destroyed. Meanwhile, in South Vietnam before 1975, religious freedom was protected, allowing churches to be built and missionary work to expand. The government actively supported religious institutions.

After 1975, following the fall of the Republic of Vietnam and the establishment of a unified socialist regime, the state seized numerous Catholic properties across the country. These properties were “borrowed” by the state for public use, but never returned. During the post-1975 period, many Catholic priests, monks, and laypeople were summoned, sent to re-education camps without trial, or imprisoned. One of the most notable figures was Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, who later became the Vatican’s Minister of Justice and Peace. According to several priests in the Dioceses of Vinh, Ha Tinh, the Archdiocese of Saigon, and the Archdiocese of Hanoi, by the end of 2024, no individuals or organizations operating under the Catholic Church or its affiliated groups are currently imprisoned for religious reasons.

However, human rights violations against Catholics in Vietnam have not ceased. One less-publicized but serious issue is the government’s deep intervention in appointing church personnel, which significantly affects the Church’s autonomy. According to a priest, certain dioceses, while the ordination of priests and bishops falls under the authority of the Church, the government can intervene if it deems a candidate unsuitable for its ideological direction. In such cases, state authorities exert pressure on local bishops to prevent the ordination. This interference is particularly evident in the appointment of bishops. Even when a candidate is nominated, approved by the Vatican, and endorsed by the Church, they may still be denied the episcopal role if the Vietnamese government finds them unsuitable. In such cases, the Church is forced to select a different candidate who is acceptable to both the Vatican and the Vietnamese authorities. This type of government intervention violates the principle of religious autonomy in Church governance, a principle that has been upheld since the Church's establishment.

Religious activities in Vietnam, including those of the Catholic Church, remain under strict surveillance. The Religious Security Unit, a specialized force within the Political Security Department of the Ministry of Public Security, actively monitors, controls, and suppresses religious organizations, clergy, and believers. This unit has the authority to use security operations to curb any perceived threats that religion may pose to the political system and society. At certain religious establishments, the Religious Security Unit covertly monitors religious activities and, in

some cases, actively obstructs worship and religious gatherings. In the case of the Catholic Church, some notable locations under close government surveillance include Thái Hà Parish Church, Kỳ Đồng Redemptorist Order, and Huế Archdiocese retirement home (where priest Nguyen Van Ly is retired).

Intervention in charitable and community activities

One of the most blatant state interventions in Catholic Church affairs today concerns Catholic associations and charitable organizations. The government closely monitors and restricts the Church's humanitarian efforts. According to several Catholic doctors, a charitable medical outreach mission in Hòa Bình Province, aimed at providing free healthcare to disadvantaged communities, faced state-imposed limitations on the number of patients they could treat and the duration of their service. As a result, many poor individuals and ethnic minorities were unable to access free medical care provided by the Church.

In April 2024, the twelve-year-old program to honor disabled veterans of the Republic of Vietnam at the Redemptorists of Vietnam announced its termination, just before the 49th anniversary of the day the Communist government of Vietnam gained control of South Vietnam. The program, launched in 2008, was aimed at alleviating the suffering of war veterans from the former South Vietnamese regime. It provided medical aid and food assistance to these veterans, who do not receive government benefits or social support and often struggle with extreme hardship. Several priests in charge of the program cited security force interference as the reason for its termination.²⁸ Both priests and volunteers were detained by security forces while distributing aid, subjected to pressure, and forced to sign commitments promising to withdraw from the program. Additionally, some priests involved in the initiative were banned from leaving the country under the pretext of “national security”.²⁹

The gratitude program, according to the Party Propaganda Department, was organized by the Viet Tan Party (a political party recognized in the United States, Australia, Europe and many countries) to support the Ky Dong Redemptorist Order, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, and the H.O. Association for Assistance to Disabled Veterans and Widows of the Republic of Vietnam, in an attempt to “incite treasonous nationalism”, “resurrect the corpse of the Republic of

²⁸RFA Vietnamese, https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/program-thanking-invalid-soldiers-of-southern-vietnam-army-suspended-04182024083532.html

²⁹ <https://www.voatiengviet.com/a/tinh-dong-chua-cuu-the-gui-qua-tang-yeu-thuong-cho-thuong-phe-binh-vnch/7898407.html>

Vietnam Army”, destroy the great national unity and sabotage the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”.³⁰ These allegations demonstrate a pattern that any civil organization in Vietnam assisting disabled South Vietnamese war veterans is automatically accused of being linked to Viet Tan. The Vietnamese government often affirms that vulnerable groups in society have adequate access to state policies and support. However, accessing these benefits requires complex bureaucratic procedures, including background checks and family history verification by local authorities, leading to the potential discrimination based on an applicant's affiliation with the former South Vietnamese regime or their perceived loyalty to the current government.

Another method frequently used by the Vietnamese government to suppress Catholicism is the infringement upon the Church's right to manage its own properties. This encroachment has persisted since 1954 in northern Vietnam and expanded nationwide after 1975. The expropriation of Church property has taken various forms, including outright confiscation, forced lending, and denial of construction permits for religious structures on Church-owned land or land donated to the Church. Even after the Holy See announced the re-establishment of a Permanent Papal Representative in Vietnam in late 2023, there has been no sign that the former Apostolic Delegation building will be returned to the Church. This property was forcibly taken after the 2008 crackdown on clergy and laypeople and has since been converted into a public park and a district library in Hoàn Kiếm, Hanoi. Many other Church properties that were “borrowed” by the government have since been repurposed for non-religious use. These seized lands have been illogically converted into public facilities such as schools, parks, and hospitals. One clear example is Đống Đa Hospital in Hanoi, which was constructed on the grounds of the Hanoi Redemptorist Monastery. This infectious disease hospital, located in a densely populated residential area, has led to traffic and public health concerns. The Redemptorist order has repeatedly requested the hospital's relocation and the return of the monastery for religious use. However, the government has not only ignored these requests but has also allowed further construction, permanently altering the monastery's original structure.

In addition to government occupation, many Church properties have also been sold to private buyers, who were then granted land use rights despite opposition from clergy and lay Catholics. On January 27, 2024, the Sisters of Saint Paul and many Catholic believers protested

³⁰ <https://tinhdoantravinh.vn/2021/04/19/nhan-thuc-day-du-am-muu-tham-doc-cua-cac-the-luc-thu-dich-qua-work-in-chief-of-police-police-vnch-recognition-of-the-day-giai-phong-mien-nam-thong-nhat-dat-country-April-30-1975/>

against the construction of a private facility on the land of the Saint Paul Convent at 5A-5B Quang Trung, Hoàn Kiếm, Hanoi.³¹ This land was seized by the government in 1954, despite the fact that the convent had full ownership papers dating back to 1949.³² In 2016, the government sold this land to private entities and allowed construction without negotiating with the Convent, leading to years of legal disputes and protests.



Nuns of the Saint Paul Convent in Hanoi protested against construction on their convent land in 2018 (Source: Thai Ha Church Media channel)

3.3. Other independent religious groups

In 2024, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs officially recognized the Vietnam United Gospel Outreach Church as a legal religious organization after more than 23 years of operation in Vietnam.³³ While this recognition is a positive development, it does not erase the longstanding repression of religious groups in the country, particularly those that remain unrecognized by the government.

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ9hGF519UM>

³² <https://nhathothaiha.net/voa-len-tieng-vu-viec-tai-dong-thanh-phaolo-ha-noi/>

³³ <https://moha.gov.vn/so-lieu-thong-ke-nganh-noi-vu/thu-truong-bo-noi-vu-vu-chien-thang-trao-quyet-din-d891-t56019.html>

Especially after the June 2023 incident, when a group of Montagnards in the Central Highlands attacked the headquarters of several administrative agencies and murdered several officials, the campaign to suppress independent religious groups in the indigenous community was further intensified.

Northern mountainous region

According to an article published in Xây Dựng Đảng (Party Building) Magazine in late July 2024, the province of Lai Châu has completely eliminated the presence of Bà Cô Dợ, Giê Sùa, and Ân Điển Cứu Rỗi (Grace Salvation) followers. Previously, the province had 1,296 adherents, including 763 followers of Grace Salvation, 395 followers of Bà Cô Dợ, and 138 followers of Giê Sùa.³⁴

In September 2024, the Hà Giang provincial police reported that they had successfully persuaded 748 households, totaling nearly 5,000 followers, to abandon the San Su Khẻ Tộ sect since 2018. This campaign was part of Provincial Project No. 23-ĐA/TU, launched by the Hà Giang Provincial Party Committee, which focused on “preventing, combating, and resolving activities of heretical and unrecognized religious groups” from 2018 to 2025.³⁵

According to the National Assembly’s online news portal, the province of Cao Bằng completely eradicated the Dương Văn Minh religious group in 2024.³⁶

In November 2024, Nhân Dân (The People’s Newspaper) reported that Tuyên Quang province had eliminated all independent religious organizations. The article stated that as of June 2024, the province had disbanded 12 independent religious organizations, completing the task 76 days ahead of schedule.³⁷

Central Highlands region

The Central Highlands of Vietnam is home to a large population of ethnic minorities, including the Êđê, Giarai, Bana, and Mnông. Under the former Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), these groups were collectively referred to as “Montagnards”—a term that largely fell out of common use after April 30, 1975. With the new economic migration policy of the

³⁴ <https://xaydungdang.org.vn/nhan-quyen-va-cuoc-song/ho-tro-dong-bao-mong-theo-ta-dao-tai-hoa-nhap-cong-dong-21314>

³⁵ <https://baohagiang.vn/xa-hoi/202409/xoa-ta-dao-xay-ban-lang-binh-yen-tren-vung-bien-gioi-ha-giang-ky-2-dong-long-xoa-bo-ta-dao-e2c46b8/>

³⁶ <https://quochoi.vn/pho-chu-tich/pages/pct-tran-quang-phuong.aspx?ItemID=90073&ref=luatkhoa.com>

³⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20241120141448/https://nhandan.vn/tuyen-quang-xoa-bo-hoan-toan-ta-dao-dao-la-tren-dia-ban-tinh-bao-dam-quyen-tu-do-tin-nguong-ton- Giao-post845790.html>

Vietnamese government, the northern community migrated from the northern provinces, changing the population ratio of ethnic groups in this area. Alongside this demographic shift, the state also imposed strict control over the lives of indigenous communities, including restrictions on religious freedom.

In the Central Highlands, many Protestant denominations have been denied freedom of worship and evangelism for years. Due to the diversity of Protestant sects, each with its own administrative structure and theology, the Vietnamese government has labeled many of these groups as “heretical cults” and openly declared them threats that must be eliminated.³⁸

In recent years, the Evangelical Church of Christ has been one of the primary targets of government repression. Authorities have used a range of tactics, including summoning church members, arbitrary detention, and public denunciation in local villages. Those who refuse to renounce their faith often face severe reprisals, including harsh prison sentences.

On March 24, 2024, evangelist Y Krec Bya was put on trial and sentenced to 13 years in prison under Article 116 of the Penal Code for “undermining national solidarity policies”. Y Krec Bya had previously been arrested and sentenced to 8 years in prison for participating in protests for religious freedom in 2005. During his first-instance trial on August 24, 2024, Y Krec Bya was denied access to a lawyer and family members and was not given the opportunity to appeal his sentence. Before his conviction, two other members of the Christ Protestant Church, Y Wo Nie and Nay Y Blang, were also arrested and sentenced under Article 331 for “abusing democratic freedoms”. They received prison sentences ranging from 4 years to 4 years and 6 months.

³⁸ <https://baolamdong.vn/chinh-tri/202402/canh-giac-truoc-nhung-luan-dieu-xuyen-tac-tinh-hinh-ton-Giao-o-tay-nguyen-d3f06e8/>



Y Krec Byă at his first instance trial on March 28, 2024 (Source: Cong An Online Newspaper)

In addition, Y Bum Bya, another member of the Christ Protestant Church, also suffered severe religious persecution. He was constantly harassed, threatened, and pressured by police to renounce his Protestant faith. The harassment intensified in December 2023, when he was assaulted at a police station and later publicly denounced in his village for his religious beliefs. On the morning of March 8, 2024, security forces came to his home again, demanding that he report to them. An hour later, he was found dead, hanging in a cemetery near his home. Police provided no explanation for his sudden death following his encounter with them.³⁹

On September 5, 2024, authorities in Đắk Lắk Province arrested Y Thinh Niê, a follower of the Christ Protestant Church of the Central Highlands. According to his wife, H'Le Mlo, a group

³⁹CSW UK, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2024/04/23/press/6214/article.htm>

of four police officers stormed their home and arrested both of them without providing a reason. During the interrogation, police demanded that they abandon their independent house church and join the state-sanctioned Evangelical Church of Vietnam – Southern Region. H’Le Mlo refused, and while she was released the same day, Y Thinh Niê remained in detention. By September 28, 2024, his family had received no official notification from the police regarding his detention, investigation, or any charges against him.⁴⁰ On December 6, 2024, the state-controlled ANTV news website briefly reported that he had been arrested for “undermining national solidarity policies”. Y Thinh Niê had previously participated in protests for religious freedom and indigenous rights in 2004 and had continued his peaceful activism. He and other Protestant followers were frequently detained and pressured to renounce their independent religious practices in favor of state-approved churches. In July 2024, Y Thinh Niê and 14 other followers sent a letter to the leadership of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, affirming their commitment to refusing state-controlled religious organizations.⁴¹

According to Công an Nhân dân Online (People’s Public Security Online Newspaper), the elimination of the Christ Protestant Church is part of Resolution 35-NQ/TW, issued on October 22, 2018, by the Politburo. The resolution focuses on “strengthening the protection of the Party’s ideological foundations and combating hostile and erroneous viewpoints”. After four years of implementing this campaign, more than 300 followers have renounced their faith, and 20 followers have been publicly denounced. In Phú Yên Province, in September 2024, security forces announced they had completely eradicated all religious activities and followers of the Christ Protestant Church in the province.⁴² Believers in Song Hinh, Phu Yen province have switched to state-recognized religious organizations.

4. Human rights activists and prisoners of conscience

4.1. Human rights activists

In 2024, the Vietnamese government intensified its repression of dissenting voices by arresting and prosecuting activists, journalists, and opposition figures. Some notable cases include:

⁴⁰ <https://www.voatiengviet.com/a/uscirf-keu-goi-phong-thich-tin-huu-tin-lanh-doc-lap-y-thinh-nie/7802693.html>

⁴¹ <https://www.machsongmedia.org/vietnam/quyenconnguoai/2228-hoi-thanh-tin-lanh-viet-nam-mien-nam-lai-bi-neu-dich-danh.html>

⁴² People’s Police Online, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240918033636/https://cand.com.vn/Chong-dien-bien-hoa-binh/xoa-bo-tin-lanh-dang-christ-tay-nguyen-o-song-hinh-ky-1--i744341/>

- On February 29, 2024, Nguyễn Chí Tuyền, a well-known activist, was arrested and charged with “anti-state propaganda” under Article 117 of the Penal Code. He was tried on August 15, 2024, and sentenced to five years in prison for his political and social commentary on Facebook and YouTube;
- On the same day, February 29, 2024, Nguyễn Vũ Bình was also arrested under Article 117. Bình, a former writer for the Communist Review, later became an independent journalist, publishing critical analyses in international outlets. On September 10, 2024, he was sentenced to seven years in prison;
- Two activists associated with the “Nhật Ký Yêu Nước” (Patriotic Diary) Facebook page, Nguyễn Văn Lâm and Phan Tất Thành, were tried in two separate trials on March 26, 2024 and May 8, 2024, respectively, on the same charges of “propaganda against the state” and were both sentenced to 8 years in prison. During pre-trial detention, Phan Tất Thành alleged that he and his family were subjected to torture and forced confessions, but these accusations remain uninvestigated by authorities.
- On September 20, 2024, Ho Chi Minh City police arrested Trần Khắc Đức on charges of anti-state propaganda. Mr. Duc is a member of the Paris-based Assembly for Democracy and Pluralism (Tập Hợp Dân Chủ Đa Nguyên), an organization calling for democracy, pluralism, and multi-party system for Vietnam. Police accused him of administering “reactionary websites” and posting content that insulted national leaders, distorted history, and undermined national unity;⁴³
- On October 30, 2024, Đường Văn Thái was sentenced to 12 years in prison in a closed-door trial under Article 117. Thái was an outspoken critic of government corruption and misconduct, particularly regarding high-ranking officials. Facing political persecution, he fled to Thailand in 2018 to seek asylum. However, in 2023, he was kidnapped in Thailand and forcibly returned to Vietnam by land. His abduction follows a pattern of cross-border operations conducted by Vietnamese security forces, such as the kidnapping of Trịnh Xuân Thanh in Germany and Trương Duy Nhất in Thailand.

⁴³ <https://baochinhphu.vn/khoi-to-bat-tam-giam-doi-tuong-tran-khac-duc-ve-hanh-vi-chong-pha-nha-nuoc-102241109201042795.htm>

In recent years, the Vietnamese government has continued its widespread crackdown on human rights, significantly shrinking civil society space. Many activists have been arrested and imprisoned, while the few remaining are subjected to various forms of harassment, including:

- **Surveillance of personal activities:** Many activists and their families have reported being constantly monitored in their daily activities, both in-person and online. Authorities have also increased surveillance and restricted movement for dissidents, particularly during major political and diplomatic events. Additionally, local police conduct “regular check-ins” with activists on national holidays such as Lunar New Year, April 30, and September 2 (Independent Day). These periodic inspections serve as a reminder that they remain under government watch.

- **Obstruction of administrative procedures and daily life:** Activists have reported difficulties in obtaining basic administrative documents, such as personal identification, judicial records, or passports. Police often pressure landlords and employers, leading to activists losing their homes or jobs. In some cases, authorities have engaged in public smear campaigns, isolating activists and their families from their local communities..

- **Family harassment:** Authorities have also targeted relatives of activists to apply pressure. Former political prisoner Đặng Thị Huệ reported that in September 2024, the Thái Bình provincial police interrogated her ex-husband and 9-year-old son, attempting to track her whereabouts, despite the psychological harm inflicted on the child. Huệ was previously sentenced to 15 months in prison in 2020 for “disturbing public order” after speaking out against unjust BOT toll stations in Vietnam.⁴⁴ In December 2024, another former political prisoner, Phạm Thanh Nghiên, who is currently seeking asylum in the United States, reported that Hải Phòng police harassed her family in Vietnam. According to Nghiên's account on Radio Free Asia (RFA), on December 23, 2024, local police and security officers visited her sister's home in Hải Phòng under the pretext of “household registration checks”. However, they instead questioned the family about Nghiên's whereabouts and activities in the U.S.⁴⁵

The widespread harassment and repression tactics used by the Vietnamese government have successfully instilled fear within the social activism community. In 2024, numerous activists have been forced to cease their work or flee the country due to relentless government pressure.

⁴⁴ https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/police-question-children-political-activist-09272024144224.html

⁴⁵ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/pham-thanh-nghien-dan-ap-xuyen-quoc-gia-12242024091646.html>

Activist Nguyen Ho Nhat Thanh officially announced the shutdown of FredHub (Free Education Hub), an organization providing critical thinking and liberal education courses.⁴⁶ This decision came after police interrogated and threatened both lecturers and students for their involvement. Some FredHub students reported that they were still summoned by security forces even after the center was dissolved.

In early December 2024, prominent lawyer Trịnh Vĩnh Phúc fled Vietnam to seek political asylum in the United States after enduring 20 months of continuous police pressure from Long An provincial authorities. He became the fourth defense lawyer in the controversial Tịnh Thất Bồng Lai / Thiên Am Bên Bờ Vũ Trụ case to leave the country. In the case that occurred at Bong Lai Monastery, also known as Thien Am Ben Bo Vu Tru, there were 5 lawyers participating in the defense, including Trinh Vinh Phuc, Dang Dinh Manh, Nguyen Van Mieng, Dao Kim Lan and Ngo Thi Hoang Anh. In April 2023, all 5 lawyers were summoned by the Long An provincial police for disseminating information on the internet, which was considered to have “signs of abusing democratic freedoms”, after these lawyers protested against the acts of violating judicial activities and seriously violating criminal proceedings committed by the Long An provincial prosecution agencies during the investigation and trial. Three lawyers—Đặng Đình Mạnh, Nguyễn Văn Miếng, and Đào Kim Lân—were forced to flee Vietnam in June 2023 after police issued groundless warrants for their arrest.

Prominent environmentalist Hoàng Thị Minh Hồng also chose to seek asylum abroad with her family after being arrested and convicted on politically motivated tax evasion charges. Despite being released 20 months early from a three-year prison sentence, her criminal record severely limits her ability to work with government-approved NGOs in Vietnam.

Ngô Thị Tố Nhiên, arrested in 2023, was put on trial on June 27, 2024, for allegedly misappropriating documents from Vietnam Electricity (EVN). At the time of her arrest, she was reportedly conducting research on Vietnam's energy transition, advocating for phasing out coal and promoting renewable energy. She was sentenced to 42 months in prison.

It can be seen that in the past 4 years, Vietnamese authorities have systematically targeted environmental activists and NGO leaders, including Phan Mai Lợi, Bạch Hùng Dương, Đặng Đình Bách, Nguyễn Thị Khanh, Ngô Thị Tố Nhiên, and Hoàng Thị Minh Hồng. These are all people with

⁴⁶ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/education-firm-fredhub-dissolved-but-dozens-members-interrogated-10092024025844.html>

expertise and strong policy advocacy capacity on environmental issues and workers' rights, two pillars of the sustainability goals of new-generation trade agreements. However, having been convicted of a crime will deprive these experts of the opportunity to participate in independent monitoring under the mechanisms of trade agreements such as the Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) mechanism of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). Article 3 of Decision No. 1972/QĐ-BCT of the Ministry of Industry and Trade on the establishment of DAG Vietnam stipulates that organizations that have violated the law will not be considered members of DAG Vietnam. Therefore, the arrest and imprisonment of the above activists are likely to be politically motivated attempts to eliminate independent civil society oversight.

Beyond repressing dissidents, the Vietnamese government has also turned against reform-minded officials within its own ranks, as seen in the arrests of Nguyễn Văn Bình, Director of the Legal Department of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), and Vũ Minh Tiến, Head of the Policy and Law Department of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) and Director of the Institute of Workers and Trade Unions (IWTU). These two officials were widely regarded as policy reformers who advocated for greater labor rights. Before his arrest, Nguyễn Văn Bình was leading efforts to present ILO Convention 87 to the Vietnamese National Assembly. If ratified, this landmark convention would grant Vietnamese workers the right to form independent unions without prior government approval, which the Vietnamese government has long resisted.⁴⁷

Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security, under the direct leadership of Tô Lâm, has also expanded cross-border repression efforts in recent years. In March 2024, Vietnamese security forces, guided by the Royal Thai Police, went to the Vietnamese refugee area near Bangkok to demand that they return home, threatening that if they did not return, they would be arrested by Thai police.⁴⁸ A key case was Y Quynh Bdap, co-founder of Montagnards Stand for Justice (MSFJ), who was arrested by Thai police on June 11, 2024, for alleged immigration violations at Vietnam's request. Despite international human rights concerns and the principle of non-refoulement, the Thai Criminal Court approved his extradition to Vietnam, where he faces a 10-year prison sentence on terrorism charges.

⁴⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/articles/cpeewjz8n4yo>

⁴⁸ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamese-security-officers-chase-montagnard-refugees-in-thailand-03152024055011.html>



Montagnard activist Y Quynh Bdap

The arrests and diverse harassment strategies targeting activists across various fields and work environments have virtually paralyzed Vietnam’s civil society space. In a report published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in September 2024, the UN body noted that the Vietnamese government engaged in acts of retaliation against individuals and organizations collaborating with the UN between May 2023 and April 2024. As a result, the number of human rights reports submitted during Vietnam’s 4th Universal Periodic Review (UPR) before the Human Rights Council in May 2024 dropped significantly.⁴⁹

4.2. Prisoners of conscience

Prisoners of conscience (PoCs) continue to face retaliation from authorities while in detention. Although the law stipulates minimum standards of treatment for prisoners—including access to clean food, limits on the number of inmates per cell, designated time for outdoor exercise, and the right to family visits—these rights are routinely violated. Many PoCs have developed chronic illnesses after their release due to these harsh conditions.

⁴⁹ UN, Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, A/HRC/57/60, 2024, para. 177

For example, Nguyễn Ngọc Ánh, a PoC who was released on August 30, 2024, suffered severe health deterioration over six years in prison, nearly losing both his eyesight and hearing. Similarly, Nguyễn Trung Tôn, who is serving a 12-year sentence at Gia Trung Prison in Gia Lai province, has been battling multiple illnesses due to the harsh living conditions. He has suffered from a persistent post-COVID cough for three years, prostate inflammation, and eye disease due to poor hygiene conditions. However, prison authorities have only provided basic medication without proper medical examination, worsening his condition to the point that one of his eyes is nearly blind.

To protest inhumane treatment in prison, many PoCs in different detention centers have resorted to measures ranging from filing complaints to hunger strikes. For instance, Bùi Văn Thuận, Trịnh Bá Tư, and Đặng Đình Bách, detained at Thanh Chương Prison in Nghệ An province, began a hunger strike on September 28. According to Trịnh Thị Nhung, the wife of Bùi Văn Thuận, these three activists decided to go on a hunger strike to protest harsh and rights-violating prison conditions at Thanh Chương Prison. Since April 11, 2024, political prisoners have been isolated in separate areas cut off from the common yard and other prison cells by “tiger cages”. They were not allowed to go outside for exercise or social activities, despite prison regulations stating that inmates should be permitted to participate in cultural and sports activities in the common yard every Sunday. Each cell, measuring only about 12 square meters, lacks proper ventilation but holds up to four people, making conditions unbearable, especially in the scorching summer heat. Following persistent protests by political prisoners, on October 19, Thanh Chương Prison agreed to improve detention conditions. The tiger cage doors are now kept open regularly, and prisoners are allowed to exercise and socialize in the common yard.⁵⁰

⁵⁰RFA Vietnamese, <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/two-political-prisoners-stop-hunger-strike-as-prison-improves-detention-conditions-10312024042219.html>



Activists Trinh Bá Tư (left), Bùi Văn Thuận (middle) and Đặng Đình Bách (right)

It is evident that while activists refuse to abandon their fight for human rights even when deprived of their freedom, the government, in turn, strategically uses these individuals as leverage in international political negotiations. This was particularly evident in the early release of three activists before and after newly appointed President Tô Lâm’s visit to the United States in September 2024. These three activists include:

- Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức, a well-known activist recognized for his unyielding determination, was arrested in 2009 and sentenced to 16 years in prison on charges of “activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s government”. He was released on September 20, 2024, eight months earlier than his full sentence, following a presidential pardon. However, Thức has always maintained his innocence and never submitted a clemency request, which is a legal prerequisite for presidential pardons. For the past 15 years, he and his family have persistently filed petitions urging the courts and prosecutors to review his conviction. In an interview with Radio Free Asia (RFA), he revealed that prison officials forcibly removed him from prison and put him on a flight from Nghệ An to Ho Chi Minh City, despite his objections to the President’s lenient decision.⁵¹
- Hoàng Thị Minh Hồng was released on September 21, 2024, 20 months ahead of schedule from her three-year prison sentence for tax evasion.⁵² Before her arrest, Hồng

⁵¹ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/tran-huynh-duy-thuc-forced-to-leave-prison-before-to-lam-trip-09212024055824.html>

⁵² <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3279434/leading-climate-activist-released-vietnam-jail>

was the founder and director of the Center for Action and Networking for Development and Environment (CHANGE), and one of the pioneering environmental activists. In 2022, CHANGE and many Vietnamese NGOs registered with the government had to declare a temporary suspension or termination of operations under pressure from the government.

- Trần Phi Long was released on October 23, 2024, 21 months early from his five-year prison sentence for “activities aimed at overthrowing the government”. He was arrested on July 14, 2018, and was tried in the same case as Huỳnh Đức Thanh Bình and Michael Phuong Minh Nguyễn, a Vietnamese-American citizen.⁵³

Additionally, prisoner of conscience Nguyễn Thúy Hạnh was released on schedule on October 7, 2024, after being detained and forcibly subjected to psychiatric treatment for three years and six months. Nguyễn Thúy Hạnh was the founder and operator of the 50k Fund, which provided support to families of prisoners of conscience and struggling activists. She was arrested on April 7, 2021, on charges of “propaganda against the State”, and was only brought to trial on July 31, 2024, in a closed court session without a defense lawyer. She was sentenced to three years and six months in prison, with no probation period.⁵⁴ Throughout her detention, medical treatment, and imprisonment, she was held in detention centers and hospitals in Hanoi. However, just before her scheduled release, she was abruptly transferred to a prison in Thanh Hóa province, about 170 kilometers from Hanoi, and was forced to return to Hanoi on her own by public bus on October 7, 2024.

Earlier, in January 2024, many organizations and individuals launched a petition urging the Vietnamese government to release Nguyễn Thúy Hạnh, as she was simultaneously battling depression and cancer during pre-trial detention. Within a short period, over 200 people signed the petition. Many of them were summoned by local police and warned against signing or calling for her release.⁵⁵

Families of prisoners of conscience who persistently advocate for their loved ones' innocence have also faced harassment and repression from authorities. In March 2024, the families

⁵³ <https://the88project.org/profile/183/tran-long-phi/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/activist-nguyen-thuy-hanh-released-after-being-tried-in-closed-doors-10072024045208.html>

⁵⁵ <https://congan.daklak.gov.vn/-/au-tranh-voi-oi-tuong-tham-gia-ung-ho-ky-ten-vao-on-kien-nghi-mien-trach-nhiem-hinh-su-cho-nguyen-thuy-hanh->

of Bùi Văn Thuận, Trịnh Bá Phương, Đặng Đăng Phước, Nguyễn Năng Tĩnh, and Nguyễn Thị Tâm were summoned by police due to their activities on Facebook. These families frequently use social media to share updates and raise awareness about imprisoned activists and those in danger. On March 13, 2024, Lê Thị Kiều Oanh, the wife of former PoC Phạm Minh Hoàng, was also summoned for questioning regarding “public order and security” after visiting her husband in France. In 2017, Hoàng had his Vietnamese citizenship revoked and was deported to France after serving 17 months in prison under Article 79 of the 1999 Penal Code, accused of “activities aimed at overthrowing the government”.

On April 18, 2024, Phạm Thị Lân, the wife of prisoner of conscience Nguyễn Tường Thụy, was barred from leaving Vietnam while traveling by land to Cambodia for a tourist trip. According to the official travel restriction notice from the Mộc Bài International Border Gate (Tây Ninh Border Guard Command), Lân was prohibited from exiting Vietnam under Official Dispatch No. 472 (March 6, 2023) from the Department of Homeland Security and another directive from the Immigration Management Department (March 8, 2023). However, authorities provided no explanation for the travel ban.⁵⁶

5. Ethnic minorities

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country, with 54 officially recognized ethnic groups with long-standing traditions and cultures spread throughout its territory, along with a small number of naturalized people from many countries and territories around the world. With a majority of more than 82 million people (85.32%), the Kinh (Viet) people are the main ethnic community that has controlled the country's governance issues throughout history. However, regions such as the Northwest, the Central Highlands, South-Central, and Southern Vietnam were historically home to numerous ethnic groups with deep cultural and historical roots, including the Chăm, Khmer, Central Highlands ethnic groups, Thái, and H'Mông in the northern mountains. With an official policy of ethnic equality and harmony, as well as various support programs for ethnic minorities, Vietnam's Propaganda Department in recent years has affirmed the country's commitment to ensuring equal rights for all ethnic groups. Although Vietnam has not experienced severe ethnic

⁵⁶ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/wife-of-prisoner-of-conscience-nguyen-thuong-thuy-banned-from-going-abroad-04192024051828.html>

conflicts like in some other parts of the world, ethnic issues remain complex in terms of human rights. Within the scope of this report, the drafting team can only highlight a few specific cases.

In 2024, authorities in several Mekong Delta provinces increased their crackdown and harassment against supporters of Khmer Krom rights, the indigenous people of the region.

In May 2024, at least five Khmer individuals in Trà Vinh province told RFA that they had been harassed by authorities after expressing support for Khmer rights. Local police summoned them for questioning over their social media activities. Although these were officially “invitations”, meaning compliance was not legally required, in one case, a commune police officer demanded strict compliance and refused to accept any excuses for absence. Another case in Soc Trang province, Mr. Trieu Sieu was informed that he would not be issued a passport because he was banned from leaving the country from August 1, 2023 to August 1, 2026, without any specific reason. Triệu Siêu was denied a passport due to a travel ban from August 1, 2023, to August 1, 2026, with no specific reason provided. Triệu Siêu had previously participated in distributing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, alongside other activists. In late January 2023, he was summoned by police after sharing information about the repression of the Khmer people.⁵⁷

On March 20, 2024, the People’s Court of Cầu Ngang District, Trà Vinh Province, sentenced two Khmer Krom individuals, Tô Hoàng Chương and Thạch Cương, under Article 331 of the Penal Code for “abusing democratic freedoms”. They received prison sentences of 3 years and 6 months, and 4 years, respectively.⁵⁸ According to the indictment, the two men were accused of posting, sharing, and live-streaming content deemed to “harm national and religious unity, distort the government and Vietnamese history, insult the reputation of the People's Public Security forces, slander local authorities, the Sóc Trăng provincial police, the Trà Cú district police, the Trà Cú Patriotic Monks' Solidarity Association, Trà Vinh Obstetrics and Pediatrics Hospital, and an individual doctor at the hospital”. Tô Hoàng Chương had previously distributed copies of the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to raise awareness of Khmer Krom rights.

⁵⁷ <https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/news/vietnamnews/vietnamese-authorities-increase-suppression-against-khmer-human-rights-activists-05302024031455.html>

⁵⁸ <https://www.baotravinhh.vn/phap-luat-ban-doc/tuyen-y-an-doi-voi-02-bi-cao-thach-cuong-va-to-hoang-chuong-37359.html>

Before becoming an official part of Vietnam’s territory, the Central Highlands were historically controlled by indigenous ethnic groups such as the Ê Đê, Gia Rai, and M’ông, who had a high degree of self-governance and autonomy. Even after the region became part of French Indochina, the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and later the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the desire for self-rule among these ethnic groups remained strong. This led to the emergence of various autonomy movements in the Central Highlands, such as FULRO (United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races), the Đê Ga Autonomous State, the Montagnard Foundation, and Montagnards for Justice. The Vietnamese government's strict territorial control policies, Kinh migration programs, and ongoing tensions with local ethnic minorities have resulted in both violent and non-violent resistance in the region. One significant consequence of these movements has been waves of refugees fleeing to Cambodia and Thailand. In Thailand alone, an unofficial estimate suggests around 2,000 Montagnards are currently seeking asylum.⁵⁹



Police Lieutenant Colonel Y Luong Nie (second from right) and a delegation of Vietnamese police officers with refugees in Thailand on March 14, 2023 (Source: RFA)

However, through diplomatic and intelligence operations, Vietnamese security forces have been pressuring these refugees to return to Vietnam. On June 23, 2024, Thai police confirmed the arrest of Y Quynh Bdap at the request of the Vietnamese government on terrorism-related charges

⁵⁹ <https://www.nguoi-viet.com/dien-dan/bao-dong-ve-thuc-trang-nguoi-thuong-ti-nan-o-thai-lan-hien-nay/>

and subsequently extradited him to Vietnam. Y Quynh Bdap was a Montagnard rights activist advocating for human rights and religious freedom in the Central Highlands. While he was wanted for terrorism in Vietnam, before his arrest and extradition, he had denied all charges against him.⁶⁰

The arrest of activist Y Quynh Bdap in Thailand and his extradition to Vietnam have raised concerns that Thai authorities, under pressure from Vietnam, may take harsher measures against Montagnard refugees in Thailand. If this happens, not only will the Montagnard community be affected, but many other Vietnamese activists and dissidents seeking asylum in Thailand could also face arrest, deportation, or extradition.

On January 20, 2024, the People's Court of Đắk Lắk Province sentenced 100 defendants who had been arrested for their alleged involvement in violent unrest in the province during the night of June 10, 2024, and early morning of June 11, 2024. Although no death sentences were issued, the court handed down 10 life sentences and numerous prison terms of various lengths, making this one of the largest trials in recent years related to Montagnard self-determination movements in the Central Highlands.

V. Conclusion

Through these brief accounts of the exercise of freedom of speech and freedom of religion in Vietnam, it is evident that the Vietnamese government is increasingly expanding the scope and intensity of its human rights repression strategies. The authorities have become more adept at using legal instruments to maintain exclusive political control. With Directive 24 serving as a solid legal framework, the creation of decrees that restrict individual freedoms, such as Decree 147 on freedom of expression, is becoming more common.

Meanwhile, the voices of human rights defenders are weakening under harassment, repression, and retaliation—both inside and outside prison, and even across borders. Under government pressure, many individuals and organizations have refused to work or collaborate with international bodies. Many activists have been forced to flee Vietnam to seek asylum in democratic countries. However, even in exile, political refugees remain unsafe, as the government has demonstrated its ability to carry out transnational repression, both in cyberspace and in the real

⁶⁰<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/22/thailand-vietnamese-activist-risk-forced-return>

world, through surveillance, abductions, and diplomatic pressure on foreign governments to detain dissidents on their soil.

The human rights landscape in Vietnam is a complex picture with interconnected elements and mutual influences, yet the driving force behind these decisions and violations remains the Vietnamese government. The few positive developments in human rights practices this year remain isolated examples. Among them, the Human Rights Education Program in public schools appears to be the most promising policy, laying a foundation for a better understanding and respect for human rights values.

Though limited, these positive steps suggest that the Vietnamese government is fully capable of respecting, protecting, and promoting fundamental human rights—if they have the will to do so.

Appendix 1

List of people arrested in 2024 (as of December 31, 2024)

No.	Full name	Year of birth	Gender	Field of struggle/ Group	Date of arrest (DD/MM/YYYY)	Charged under Article
1	Phan Ngọc Dung	1955	Female	Youtuber	24/01/2024	331
2	Hoàng Tùng Thiện	1978	Male	Blogger	Early 2024	117
3	Trần Văn Khang	1962	Male	Facebooker	31/01/2024	117
4	Dương Mạnh Tiến	1982	Male	Facebooker	10/01/2024	331
5	Phạm Công Hùng Nhân	1982	Male	Freedom of Expression	17/01/2024	351
6	Phạm Văn Chờ	1960	Male	Facebooker	30/01/2024	117
7	Trần Văn Khanh	1962	Male	Facebooker	02/02/2024	117
8	Hoàng Việt Khánh	1983	Male	Facebooker	19/02/2024	117
9	Nguyễn Chí Tuyển	1974	Male	Blogger	29/02/2024	117
10	Nguyễn Vũ Bình	1968	Male	Journalist	29/02/2024	117
11	Phan Đình Sang	1967	Male	Brotherhood For Democracy	12/3/2024	117
12	Thạch Chanh Đa Ra	1990	Male	Khmer Buddhist	26/3/2024	331
13	Kim Khiêm	1978	Male	Khmer Buddhist	26/3/2024	331
14	Thạch Ve Sanal	1987	Male	Khmer Buddhist	26/3/2024	157
15	Dương Khải	1994	Male	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157
16	Thạch Quý Lầy	1986	Male	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157
17	Kim Sa Rương	1987	Male	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157
18	Thạch Chóp	2003	Male	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157
19	Thạch Nha	1997	Male	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157
20	Kim Khu	1959	Male	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157
21	Hoàng Quốc Việt	1978	Male	Facebooker	28/3/2024	331

22	Nguyễn Đức Dự	1976	Male	Facebooker	28/3/2024	331
23	Lê Phú Tuấn	1972	Male	Facebooker	29/3/2024	331
24	Lê Quốc Hùng	1978	Male	Facebooker	12/4/2024	117
25	Nguyễn Văn Bình	1973	Male	Worker's rights / MOLISA	24/4/2024	337
26	Dương Hồng Hiếu	1978	Male	Facebooker	26/4/2024	331
27	Dương Minh Cường	1996	Male	Facebooker	28/4/2024	331
28	Bùi Thị Linh	1989	Female	Facebooker	27/4/2024	331
29	Nguyễn Đức Thanh	1968	Male	PNGVN ⁱ	19/1/2024	109
30	Vũ Minh Tiến	-	Male	Worker's rights / VGCL	April 2024	337
31	Trương Huy Sơn	1962	Male	Journalist	01/6/2024	331
32	Trần Đình Triển	1959	Male	Lawyer	02/6/2024	331
33	Y Quỳnh Bđap ⁱⁱ	1992	Male	Montagnard activist	11/6/2024	-
34	Nguyễn Văn Trung	1975	Male	PNGVN	31/7/2024	109
35	Đinh Thị Ngọc Ánh	1975	Female	Land rights petitioner	July /2024	331
36	Nguyễn Đình Trung	1958	Male	Facebooker	02/8/2024	331
37	Nguyễn Văn Nhơn	1956	Male	Facebooker	03/8/2024	331
38	Y Pô Mlô	1961	Male	Protestant	15/8/2024	116
39	Phạm Hoàng	1958	Male	PNGVN	29/8/2024	109
40	Vương Văn Hồng Nam	1963	Male	PNGVN	31/8/2024	109
41	Nguyễn Thị Hường	1968	Female	PNGVN	29/8/2024	109
42	Trần Văn Lĩnh	1967	Male	PNGVN	29/8/2024	109
43	Bùi Văn Khang	1949	Male	Lawyer	04/9/2024	331
44	Y Thịnh Niê	-	Male	Protestant	05/9/2024	116
45	Trần Khắc Đức	1995	Male	Tập hợp Dân chủ đa nguyên	20/9/2024	117
46	Nguyễn Ngọc Châu	1961	Female	PNGVN	22/9/2024	109
47	Bùi Thị Hồng Vân	1962	Female	Land rights petitioner	26/9/2024	331

48	Trần Thị Hồng Duyên	1984	Female	PNGVN	27/9/2024	109
49	Bùi Thị Ánh Ngọc	1958	Female	PNGVN	27/9/2024	109
50	Nguyễn Việt Tú	1973	Male	PNGVN	30/9/2024	109
51	Trịnh Bá Hạnh	1987	Male	PNGVN	30/9/2024	109
52	Lê Thị Hoà	1972	Female	Land rights petitioner	-	331
53	Nguyễn Văn Trọng	1970	Male	Land rights petitioner	-	331
54	Bùi Văn Tuấn	1983	Male	Facebooker	04/11/2024	331
55	Lê Mạnh	1951	Male	Facebooker	04/11/2024	331
56	Huỳnh Nhật Phương	1987	Male	PNGVN	13/11/2024	109
57	Bùi Tiến Lợi	1969	Male	Facebooker	20/11/2024	331
58	Nguyễn Thanh Huy	1966	Male	Facebooker	20/12/2024 ⁱⁱⁱ	117
59	Nguyễn Trần Khánh Huy	2000	Male	Facebooker	31/12/2024	331

Appendix 2

List of people to be tried in 2024 (as of December 30, 2024)

No.	Full name	Year of birth	Gender	Field of struggle/ Group	Date of arrest (DD/MM/YYYY)	Charge d under Article	First instance trial	Appeal trial	Number of years in prison
1	Phạm Văn Ướt	1992	Nam	PNGVN	December 2022	109	18/01/2024		14
2	Danh Minh Quang	1987	Nam	Khmer Krom	31/7/2023	331	07/02/2024		3 years 6 months
3	Đỗ Minh Hiền	1957	Nam	Facebooker	14/7/2023	117	13/3/2024		6
4	Tô Hoàng Chương	1988	Nam	Khmer Krom	31/7/2023	331	20/3/2024	23/5/2024	4
5	Thạch Cương	1897	Nam	Khmer Krom	31/7/2023	331	20/3/2024	23/5/2024	3 years 6 months
6	Nguyễn Văn Lâm	1991	Nam	Facebooker (Nhật ký yêu nước)	07/7/2024	117	26/3/2024		8
7	Y Kréc Byă	1978	Nam	Protestant	08/4/2023	116	28/3/2024		13
8	Nguyễn Thị Bạch Huệ	1964	Nữ	PNGVN	April 2023	117	15/4/2024		12
9	Phan Thị Thảo	1957	Nữ	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		13
10	Trần Thiện	1972	Nam	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		12
11	Cao Thị Ngọc Diễm	1969	Nữ	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		9
12	Trần Thị Kim Loan	1962	Nữ	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		8
13	Trần Huệ Chân Vương	1971	Nam	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		9

14	Vũ Đình Lan	1973	Nữ	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		12
15	Tạ Văn Triệu	1974	Nam	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		13
16	Huỳnh Thị Khánh Trang	1977	Nữ	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		12
17	Trần Thọ	1957	Nam	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		8
18	Cao Cương	1972	Nam	PNGVN	June 2022	109	23/4/2024		4
19	Dương Tuấn Ngọc	5/15/1985	Nam	Facebooker	11/7/2023	117	24/4/2024		7
20	Nguyễn Thu Hằng	1962	Nữ	Facebooker	27/11/2023	331	24/4/2024		2
21	Phan Tất Thành	1986	Nam	Facebooker (Nhật ký yêu nước)	5/7/2023	117	08/5/2024		8
22	Nguyễn Đức Thanh	1968	Nam	PNGVN	19/1/2024	109	19/6/2024		16
23	Nhật Kim Bình	1977	Nam	PNGVN	8/8/2023	109	19/6/2024		8
24	Y Luh Niê	1955	Nam	Land rights petitioner	2023	178	27/6/2024		7
25	Y Còh Niê	1958	Nam	Land rights petitioner	2023	178	27/6/2024		7
26	Y Lương Hlong	1984	Nam	Land rights petitioner	2023	178	27/6/2024		6
27	Y Nguôt Hđok	1978	Nam	Land rights petitioner	2023	178	27/6/2024		6
28	Y Đhoan Byă	1975	Nam	Land rights petitioner	2023	178	27/6/2024		6
29	Y Rôsi Niê	1984	Nam	Land rights petitioner	2023	178	27/6/2024		5
30	Ngô Thị Tố Nhiên	1974	Nữ	NGO (VIETSE)	15/9/2023	342	27/6/2024		3 years 6 months

31	Phạm Văn Chờ	1960	Nam	Facebooker	30/1/2024	117	11 07 2024		12
32	Nguyễn Chí Tuyển	1974	Nam	Blogger	29/2/2024	117	15/8/2024		5
33	Lê Phú Tuấn	1972	Nam	Facebooker	29/3/2024	331	22/8/2024		4 years 8 months
34	Phan Đình Sang	1967	Nam	Brotherhood For Democracy	12/3/2024	117	26/8/2024		6
35	Trần Văn Khanh	1962	Nam	Facebooker	31/01/2024	117	04/9/2024		7
36	Phan Ngọc Dung	1955	Nữ	Youtuber	24/01/2024	331	04/9/2024		3
37	Bùi Văn Khang	1949	Nam	Lawyer	04/9/2024	331	04/9/2024		2
38	Hoàng Tùng Thiện	1978	Nam	Blogger	Early 2024	117	10/9/2024		7
39	Nguyễn Vũ Bình	1968	Nam	Journalist	29/2/2024	117	10/9/2024		7
40	Trần Minh Lợi	1968	Nam	Facebooker	01/12/2023	331	15/8/2024		5
41	Phan Văn Bách	1975	Nam	CHTV	29/12/2023	117	16/9/2024		5
42	Hoàng Việt Khánh	1983	Nam	Facebooker	19/2/2024	117	24/9/2024		8
43	Đường Văn Thái	1982	Nam	Youtuber	4/14/2023	117	30/10/2024		12
44	Nguyễn Văn Nhơn	1956	Nam	Facebooker	01/7/2024	331	13/11/2024		2 years 6 months
45	Thạch Chanh Đa Ra	1990	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	26/3/2024	331	26/11/2024		6
46	Kim Khiêm	1978	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	26/3/2024	331	26/11/2024		3

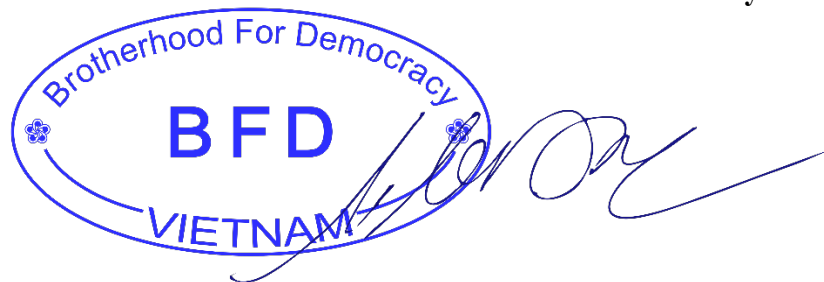
47	Thạch Ve Sanal	1987	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	26/3/2024	157	26/11/2024		2 years 6 months
48	Duong Khải	1994	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157	26/11/2024		5 years 9 months
49	Thạch Quý Lầy	1986	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157	26/11/2024		2
50	Kim Sa Ruong	1987	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157	26/11/2024		2
51	Thạch Chóp	2003	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157	26/11/2024		2
52	Thạch Nha	1997	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157	26/11/2024		2
53	Kim Khu	1959	Nam	Khmer Buddhist	28/3/2024	157	26/11/2024		2
54	Đinh Thị Ngọc Ánh	1975	Nữ	Land rights petitioner	July 2024	331	27/12/2024		1 year 6 months

ⁱ PNGVN: Provisional National Government of Vietnam

ⁱⁱ Y Quynh Bdap: Montagnard activist arrested by Thai police at the request of the Vietnamese government. At the end of 2024, he is still in detention in Thailand.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nguyễn Thanh Huy was prosecuted and placed under house arrest, not yet in detention.

Founder and President of Brotherhood For Democracy



Nguyen Van Dai