

Joint Statement for the EU-Viet Nam Human Rights Dialogue

On the occasion of the 12th EU-Viet Nam Human Rights Dialogue, held on 4 July 2024 in Brussels, ARTICLE 19 and the undersigned organisations and individuals call on the European Union (EU) to urge the Viet Nam government to repeal and/or amend repressive laws and regulations and drop prosecution and harassment of journalists and activists and others who exercise their freedom of expression. The EU, as a staunch advocate for human rights, has a critical role in protecting the rights of freedom of expression and association globally. We call on the EU to urge the Viet Nam government to respect its obligations under international human rights standards. We also hope that the EU will continue to support the civil society in Viet Nam and undertake further engagement with the tech sector to improve their adherence to human rights standards in the country.

The annual EU-Viet Nam Human Rights Dialogue is an important forum for the EU and Viet Nam to outline their commitments to human rights, exchange views on challenges and measures for improvement, and stress the importance of cooperation with UN Human Rights mechanisms.

We, the undersigned human rights and civil society organisations are concerned that Viet Nam continues to severely restrict human rights, in particular the rights to freedom of expression and association, in violation of its obligations under international human rights law. According to [ARTICLE 19's Global Expression Report 2024](#) which highlights a significant decline in freedom of expression globally, Viet Nam is classified in the "in crisis" category due to severe restrictions on freedom of expression.

In particular, we would like to bring the following two key issues to the attention of the EU representatives and urge them to raise them with the Viet Nam Government:

- 1. Amend legislation that fails to meet international human rights standards such as the Penal Code (2015), Cybersecurity Law (2018), and the Decree 72/2013/ND-CP.**

The Viet Nam Government should reform restrictive laws that target political activism and dissent and penalise online expression. Restrictive provisions under the Penal Code (Articles 109, 117, and 331), the Cybersecurity Law (2018), and a new draft of Decree 72 may soon require social media users to use real identities and mandate platforms to verify users' identities.

We urge the EU to put pressure on the Viet Nam government to repeal or amend these laws and emphasise the necessity of aligning Vietnamese national laws with international human rights standards.

2. Stop targeting and prosecuting journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and others for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association.

[A recent report](#) by Legal Initiatives for Vietnam (LIV) indicates that the Viet Nam government has systematically targeted activists, journalists, and others who express dissenting views on digital platforms, using vaguely defined laws to justify arrests and censorship. Restrictive provisions of the Penal Code, which criminalises activities deemed to undermine the state, have been used to arrest and intimidate journalists, activists, and NGO leaders. These include the [Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam](#) (2019), [Phạm Đoàn Trang](#) (2020), [Báo Sạch group](#) (2021), [Trương Huy San](#) (2024), and ordinary social media users such as [Nguyễn Văn Nhanh](#) (2021), [Võ Thanh Thời](#) (2022), [Lê Thạch Giang](#) (2023).

We urge the EU to exert strong pressure on the Viet Nam government to overturn the criminal convictions of prominent journalists and activists and to unequivocally demand an end to any efforts that suppress freedom of expression in Viet Nam.

We also urge the EU to continue its support for civil society organisations and human rights defenders in Viet Nam, enabling them to amplify their voices and contribute to positive change.

Last but not least, we call on the EU to encourage tech companies operating in Viet Nam to take all possible means to protect freedom of expression. They should adhere to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and respect human rights, including freedom of expression. Tech companies must challenge blocking and removal orders issued by the Viet Nam authorities and must ensure that they do not cause, contribute to, or become complicit in human rights abuses. Even in situations where the Viet Nam Government neglects its obligations, and where domestic laws or orders conflict with international human rights standards, companies should seek ways to minimise the adverse human rights impacts of such measures in full consultation with the Viet Nam civil society.

We firmly believe that the EU, as a dedicated advocate for human rights, should take decisive action to address these concerns and take a firm and unwavering stance in safeguarding human rights in Viet Nam.

Endorsed by:

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ASEAN Coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship