

# Open Letter to the European Parliament: HUMAN RIGHTS BEFORE FREE TRADE WITH VIETNAM

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September 25, 2019

To:

- **The President of the European Parliament David Sassoli**
- **The Chair of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights Maria Arena**
- **The Members of the European Parliament**

We, the undersigned organizations, urge members of the European Parliament to delay consideration of the free trade agreement with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

As the most ambitious free trade deal between the EU and an emerging economy to date, it is essential that the European-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) truly supports EU human rights values through trade. So far, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has only offered empty promises.

After negotiating the draft agreement in 2016, the Vietnamese government undertook a sustained crackdown against human rights defenders, citizen journalists, and environmental activists. Laws, courts and the legal system have been used to criminalize the peaceful exercise of internationally protected rights and to deny fair trial rights and access to effective remedies. Rights criminalized included freedom of expression, assembly, association, to participate in public affairs and the right to engage in human rights advocacy. Victims are routinely subjected to arbitrary detention and other atrocities. Rather than build confidence in its human rights commitment, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has increased its repression, and continues to violate the international norms and laws that it has ratified.

On 18 October 2018, the Vietnamese authorities upheld the 20-year sentence of Le Dinh Luong, an environmental activist that thirty-two Members of the European Parliament had [called to be released](#).

During the time when representatives of the EU were in Vietnam to sign the EVFTA, political prisoners in Camp 6 of Nghe An province undertook a [hunger strike](#) to protest poor conditions in detention—including the removal of electric fans from the cells while the summer heat pushed indoor temperatures to over 42 degrees Celsius. This ill-treatment is an example of the systematic efforts by the Vietnamese government to physically and psychologically [torture prisoners of conscience](#).

Furthermore, Vietnam's new [Cyber Security Law threatens freedom](#) of expression and user privacy. In recent years, Vietnamese citizens have used social media to expose environmental disasters such as the Formosa toxic spill and uncover poor working conditions. This law criminalizes those who share information about social issues. It enables internet censorship that is contrary to transparency and the interests of European investors.

Therefore, the EU should only expand its economic relations with Vietnam when the Hanoi government:

- Satisfies the human rights benchmarks outlined in [the letter of thirty-two members of Parliament](#) (17 Sept 2018), including repealing articles in Vietnam's penal code that directly violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Adheres to labor standards that Hanoi has so far only offered to ratify, specifically International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 87 on the right to organize, 98 on collective bargaining, and 105 on the abolition of forced labor.

- Comply with the recommendations of the UN treaty monitoring bodies including the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN Committee Against Torture and of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam must demonstrate its commitment to respect and ensure international human rights that are guaranteed and established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international and regional instruments. Otherwise, the EU would risk trade with a state that represses citizens who advocate for environmental protection, worker rights and the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed by international laws and standards that are binding on Viet Nam.

Thank you for your support.

ACAT

Bau Bi Tuong Than

Defend the Defenders

Free Vietnam Journalists Association

Lawyers Rights Watch Canada

Reporters Without Borders

Viet Tan

Association of Former Political Prisoners - Houston

Association of Former Republic of Vietnam Military Officers

Association of Former Vietnamese Political Prisoners - Hawaii

Catholic Parish of St.Petronilla in Münster

Civil Rights Movement UK

Clemensschwester Münster

Ecole Sauvage

Free Vietnamese Canadian Community of Ottawa

Former Federal Republic of Vietnam Police Force Association - Massachusetts

General Association for Vietnamese Students of Paris

Hoi Den Hung Foundation

Organisation of Vietnamese Activities in Germany

Organization of Vietnamese Refugees of the Federal Republic of Germany

Radio TNT

Republic Of Vietnam Artillery Unit Veterans Association of Houston

Republic Of Vietnam Veterans Association of Ontario

Republic Of Vietnam Veterans Association of Switzerland

Swiss Vietnam Committee COSUNAM

Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam - Germany

Vietnam Alliance Restoration

Vietnam Conservation Society in Norway

Vietnam House Berlin

Vietnamese American Community of Massachusetts

Vietnamese Association in Saint Quentin en Yvelines

Vietnamese Association Lausanne

Vietnamese Catholic Federation in Germany

Vietnamese Catholic Mission in Switzerland

Vietnamese Community in Hamburg

Vietnamese Community in Houston

Vietnamese Community in Krefeld

Vietnamese Community in Liege

Vietnamese Community in Mannheim

Vietnamese Community in Nürnberg

Vietnamese Community in Recklinghausen

Vietnamese Community in the Netherlands

Vietnamese Community of Belgium

Vietnamese Community of Hjooring, Denmark

Vietnamese Youth Association of Paris

Vovinam VD Hung Vuong Association

Germany

Yellow Flag Womens' Association - New

England

Young Vietnamese Refugees Association