



Joint Statement by Human Rights Organizations regarding Abduction of Human Rights Defenders

7 October 2026

Vietnam must release Norwegian and Australian human rights defenders abducted in Cambodia

We, the undersigned organizations, condemn in strongest possible terms the abduction of three human rights defenders by Vietnamese authorities in Cambodia and their subsequent arbitrary detention in Vietnam.

The Vietnamese government must immediately and unconditionally release Nguyen Duc Thuan, a Norwegian citizen, Tran Hiep (Ho Pham Hiep Huy), an Australian citizen, and Thai Cong Truong Son, an ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia. Pending their release, Norwegian and Australian consular officials must be granted immediate access to Mr. Thuan and Mr. Hiep.

Background

Mr. Thuan and Mr. Hiep went missing on the morning of 18 September 2026 while traveling to the Kaoh Andoet area of Cambodia. For ten days, they were incommunicado.

On 28 September, Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security announced that the three men had been caught "illegally entering Vietnam" at the My Quy Tay Border Gate on 18 September. Subsequently, the three men are currently being investigated for "terrorism". Their families and colleagues strongly reject this account. All available information points to the fact that the men were abducted on Cambodian soil and forcibly taken across the border.

We are gravely concerned for the safety of Mr. Son as he is especially vulnerable without foreign consular protection.

Mr. Thuan, 52, pharmacist, lives in Oslo and has long advocated for human rights in Vietnam with Norwegian and European parliamentarians. Mr. Hiep, 51, IT engineer, lives in Melbourne and has worked for years on social justice and anti-trafficking initiatives. Both are members of Viet Tan, a pro-democracy organization, and have been targeted solely for their peaceful advocacy for human rights and democracy in Vietnam.

Mr. Thuan has diabetes and needs daily insulin. Any interruption to his medication puts his life at serious risk.

Why this matters beyond Vietnam

The enforced disappearance of two foreign citizens on Cambodian soil is a brazen act of transnational repression. It sends a message to every activist, journalist and individual in exile that no border nor foreign passport will keep them safe from Hanoi's authoritarian reach.

For ten days, the Vietnamese government held Mr. Thuan and Mr. Hiep in secret while their families pleaded for any word about their fate. This flouts Vietnam's duty under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations to notify Norway and Australia without delay and to give their consular officials access to its citizens.

The terrorism charges are politically motivated and follow Hanoi's long practice used against its critics. UN experts have repeatedly condemned Vietnam's use of vague and over-broad terrorism laws, and its arbitrary designation of human rights groups operating in exile as "terrorist organizations," as violating international human rights law.

A growing and alarming pattern

This abduction is the latest in the growing campaign of transnational repression by the Vietnamese authorities across Europe and Southeast Asia.

In 2017, Vietnamese agents abducted former official Trinh Xuan Thanh in Berlin, prompting Germany to expel Vietnamese diplomats. Blogger Truong Duy Nhat was seized in Thailand in 2019 and later sentenced to 10 years in prison in Vietnam. Blogger and UNHCR-recognized refugee Duong Van Thai was abducted from Thailand in 2023 and sentenced to 12 years. In November 2025, Thailand handed UNHCR-recognized refugee Y Quynh Bdap over to Vietnam, where he is now imprisoned.

Now Hanoi has crossed a new line by seizing Norwegian and Australian citizens. If the international community does not respond firmly, it will send a signal that Vietnam can continue to abduct foreign nationals without consequence.

Our calls

To the Government of Vietnam:

- Release Nguyen Duc Thuan, Tran Hiep and Thai Cong Truong Son immediately and unconditionally, and drop all charges against them.
- Grant Norwegian and Australian consular officials immediate and regular access, as required by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.
- Disclose where the three men are being held and grant them access to their families and lawyers of their choosing.
- Guarantee Mr. Thuan uninterrupted access to insulin and medical care.

To the Governments of Norway and Australia:

- Demand immediate and regular consular access to Nguyen Duc Thuan and Tran Hiep, and keep the families informed of any developments, including refusals or delays.
- Raise the case with the Vietnamese government at the highest political level, and publicly call for the immediate release of your citizens.
- Engage like-minded governments and urge them to raise the case with the Vietnamese government and hold it accountable for transnational repression.

We stand in solidarity with the families of Nguyen Duc Thuan, Tran Hiep and Thai Cong Truong Son. We will keep raising this case until all three men are free.

Signed:

1. ACAT Belgium (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture)
2. ACAT Burundi
3. ACAT Côte d'Ivoire
4. ACAT France
5. ACAT Germany
6. ACAT Sénégal
7. ACAT Switzerland
8. ACAT Tchad
9. Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN)
10. Article 19
11. Asia Human Rights and Labour Advocates (AHRLA)
12. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
13. Freedom House
14. Human Rights Foundation (HRF)
15. Judicial Reform Foundation
16. Justice Abroad
17. Khmer Movement for Democracy (KMD)

18. Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
19. Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
20. Lawyers Against Transnational Repression
21. Manushya Foundation
22. Myanmar Peace Museum
23. Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative Network
24. SOS Torture Burundi
25. Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet)
26. Tibet Initiative Deutschland e.V.
27. Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)
28. Viet Tan
29. World Liberty Congress (WLC)