



# Amnesty International

## Group 524

## June 2019



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**Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 18 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights**

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### **Vietnam: Focus on a Young Prisoner of Conscience**

In last month's newsletter, we had information on a report about Vietnam that had just been released by Amnesty International. The report documented a significant increase in the number of prisoners of conscience who were being held by the Vietnamese government. Here is the link: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA4103032019ENGLISH.pdf>

The report identifies 128 prisoners, with a brief description of each case, and also provides some overall statistics about this set of prisoners. It was no surprise to learn that the oldest prisoner is **Thich Quang Do** (born 1928). Kathy Herbst continues to pursue an update on his case, but we have not heard of any change in his situation.

In this issue, we focus on a much younger prisoner, **Nguyen Van Hoa** (born 1995). A journalist reporting for Radio Free Asia, he has been covering an issue that our group has been following – the catastrophic toxic chemical spill by Formosa Steel in April 2016, and its aftermath. Arrested in January 2017, and later sentenced to seven years in prison, Nguyen Van Hoa has reportedly been tortured in prison. For details on the case, and a letter-writing opportunity, see Pages 3 – 6.

### **New Hampshire: Death Penalty Abolished!**

Last month we reported that the outlook was promising for the abolition of the death penalty in New Hampshire. On May 30<sup>th</sup>, that goal was achieved! Kristina Roth of AIUSA issued this brief statement:

*We welcome this outstanding news. With this vote, New Hampshire will become the 21st state to have abandoned the death penalty. This inhumane practice is the ultimate irrevocable punishment and denial of human rights. It does not deter crime, and disproportionately impacts communities of color. This system is fundamentally broken and must end once and for all.*

For more on the death penalty, see Page 2.

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Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m.  
Meeting Location: Providence Heights  
9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, PA 15101



Contact John Warren (jf.warren@verizon.net or 412-766-2506) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA website ([www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org)) or the website of Amnesty International Group 39 ([amnestypgh.org](http://amnestypgh.org)).

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### Death Penalty: Personal Reaction to New Hampshire Victory

On May 31<sup>st</sup>, the day after New Hampshire approved abolition, Cynthia Walsh of AIUSA shared this personal reaction to the victory.

*I have been joyfully celebrating yesterday's news coming out of New Hampshire, which is now the 21<sup>st</sup> state to abolish the death penalty! Amnesty International was one of the founding members of the NH coalition to abolish the death penalty, going back 20-plus years.*

*On a personal level, I have worked on this campaign since 2010, and for folks who have been following this repeal campaign, you will know what an uphill battle this has been. I am reminded of the words once spoken by Martin Luther King Jr. when he so eloquently preached "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."*

### Death Penalty: Overview of Amnesty's Worldwide Campaign for Abolition

Although most of the death penalty news we receive concerns the United States, it is good to be reminded that Amnesty has been pushing for abolition worldwide since 1977. As of that year, only 16 countries had abolished the death penalty. The total now stands at 106 countries. From the Amnesty website, here are the principles at the heart of that campaign.

#### **Reasons to abolish the death penalty**

**It is irreversible and mistakes happen.** Execution is the ultimate, irrevocable punishment: the risk of executing an innocent person can never be eliminated. Since 1973, for example, more than 160 prisoners sent to death row in the USA have later been exonerated or released from death row on grounds of innocence. Others have been executed despite serious doubts about their guilt.

**It does not deter crime.** Countries who execute commonly cite the death penalty as a way to deter people from committing crime. This claim has been repeatedly discredited, and there is no evidence that the death penalty is any more effective in reducing crime than life imprisonment.

**It is often used within skewed justice systems.** In many cases recorded by Amnesty International, people were executed after being convicted in grossly unfair trials, on the basis of torture-tainted evidence and with inadequate legal representation. In some countries death sentences are imposed as the mandatory punishment for certain offences, meaning that judges are not able to consider the circumstances of the crime or of the defendant before sentencing.

**It is discriminatory.** The weight of the death penalty is disproportionately carried by those with less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds or belonging to a racial, ethnic or religious minority. This includes having limited access to legal representation, for example, or being at greater disadvantage in their experience of the criminal justice system.

**It is used as a political tool.** The authorities in some countries, for example Iran and Sudan, use the death penalty to punish political opponents.

## **Vietnam: Amnesty Issues Urgent Action for Prisoner of Conscience**

*During the next-to-last week of May, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action in behalf of **Nguyen Van Hoa**, a journalist and human rights defender who has been imprisoned since 2017. That Urgent Action can be found here:*

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/uaa07219.pdf>

*Nguyen Van Hoa had angered the Vietnamese dictatorship by reporting on the catastrophic toxic chemical spill from a Formosa Steel plant in the spring of 2016. Some of his reporting was done for Radio Free Asia (RFA), which has provided the world with thorough coverage of the spill and its aftermath.*

*Since the arrest of their reporter, RFA has kept alive public awareness of the case. The article below appeared on May 24<sup>th</sup> – the day that Amnesty issued its Urgent Action notice. It led with that new development, but then provided a full overview of Nguyen Van Hoa’s situation.*

*After the article, you will find a model letter that has been very slightly modified from the one included in the Urgent Action notice. See Page 6.*



Activist Nguyen Van Hoa (C) stood trial at a local people’s court in a central Vietnamese province



## **Vietnam: Amnesty Issues Urgent Action for Prisoner of Conscience (continued)**

*From the website of Radio Free Asia:*

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/condemns-05242019161901.html>

### **Amnesty International Condemns ‘Torture’ of Jailed RFA Blogger in Vietnam**

May 24, 2019

Rights group Amnesty International on Friday described Vietnamese prison authorities’ treatment of jailed blogger Nguyen Van Hoa as “torture,” calling him a prisoner of conscience and urging his immediate release.

Hoa, who had blogged for RFA’s Vietnamese Service and is now serving a seven-year sentence in Vietnam’s An Diem Prison, is currently being held in solitary confinement after being beaten and choked by prison guards earlier this month.

“Everyone has the right to bodily integrity,” Amnesty International Vietnam and Cambodia campaigns officer Nguyen Truong Son told RFA in an email on Friday. “No one has the right to torture anyone.”

“Moreover, Vietnam is a signatory to the U.N. Convention Against Torture, and the torture of Nguyen Van Hoa at An Diem Prison is therefore a violation of Vietnamese law and of international conventions,” Son said.

Calling Hoa a prisoner of conscience who should never have been arrested in the first place, Son demanded the jailed blogger’s “immediate and unconditional” release, and an official investigation into his treatment in custody.

“The arrest and imprisonment of Hoa only reveals the authoritarian nature of Vietnam’s government to the world,” he said.

Hoa, who had blogged and produced videos for RFA, was handed a seven-year jail term on November 27, 2017, by a court in Vietnam’s Nghe An province. Hoa had used a drone to film protests outside a Taiwan-owned steel plant, whose spill of toxic waste the year before had left fishermen and tourism workers jobless in four coastal provinces.

Arrested on January 11, 2017, for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state” under Article 258 of the Penal Code, Hoa was later charged with “conducting propaganda against the state,” a more serious charge, under Article 88.



## **Vietnam: Amnesty Issues Urgent Action for Prisoner of Conscience (continued)**

### **Hunger Strike**

Other prisoners at An Diem have now gone on hunger strike to demand Hoa's release from solitary confinement, sources told RFA in earlier reports.

Speaking on May 23<sup>rd</sup> to RFA's Vietnamese Service, Hoang Nguyen—the younger brother of another An Diem prisoner, Hoang Binh—said that his brother, political prisoner Nguyen Bac Truyen, and several others held at An Diem have refused to eat for almost two weeks.

“According to prison rules, when someone is placed in solitary confinement, the prison authorities must notify that person's cellmates, but in this case they didn't do that,” Nguyen said.

“And that led them to go on hunger strike to protest and try to get Nguyen Van Hoa released,” he said.

“We understand that hunger strikes are the last resort for prisoners of conscience when facing abuse in prison,” Son said in his May 24 email.

“We sympathize and join everyone in asking An Diem Prison to immediately cease its inhumane and inhuman treatment of Nguyen Van Hoa.”

Vietnam now holds an estimated 128 prisoners of conscience, according to a May 13, 2019, report by rights group Amnesty International.

“The Vietnamese authorities portray individuals who are peacefully exercising their human rights as criminals,” Amnesty International (AI) said in its report, *Prisoners of Conscience in Vietnam*.

“However, it is the government that flagrantly contravenes international human rights law and its own constitution,” AI said.

Nguyen Kim Binh of Vietnam Human Rights Network said in December that the one-party communist state is currently detaining more than 200 political prisoners.



**Action Opportunity: Model Letter in Behalf of Vietnamese Prisoner of Conscience**

*In the model letter below, note that Amnesty has provided us with the email addresses of the Prime Minister and the ambassador in Washington. When you prepare your letter or email, don't hesitate to adapt the language of the model letter, putting the appeal into your own words.*

Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc  
So 16, Le Hong Phong,  
Ba Dinh, Hanoi, Vietnam  
Email: [tll.mfa@mofa.gov.vn](mailto:tll.mfa@mofa.gov.vn)

Your Excellency:

I am writing to express my concern about the treatment of **Nguyen Van Hoa**, a journalist and human rights defender, who has been imprisoned solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Currently held in An Diem Prison, Nguyen Van Hoa has been tortured by prison officials in an attempt to force him to admit his "crime." After refusing to cooperate, he was placed in solitary confinement on 12 May and has remained there ever since.

Nguyen Van Hoa was arrested in January 2017 after covering a public demonstration on the Formosa environmental disaster. He was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison on the charge of "conducting propaganda against the state."

Vietnam is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture. The Constitution of Vietnam also explicitly bans the use of torture and other ill-treatment. As a result, the Vietnamese government is obligated to end the use of torture by its law enforcement officials, as well as to promptly and effectively investigate allegations of torture and bring to justice anyone suspected to be responsible.

Specifically, I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Nguyen Van Hoa. He is a prisoner of conscience, as he has been imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. Pending his release, you must ensure Nguyen Van Hoa is protected from torture and other ill-treatment while in prison. There must be a prompt and impartial investigation into allegations of torture.

Ambassador Ha Kim Ngoc  
Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam  
1233 20th St NW, Ste 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
Email: [vanphong@vietnamembassy.us](mailto:vanphong@vietnamembassy.us)  
Salutation: Dear Ambassador: