

CHINA: New report accuses the CCP of mass-scale human rights violations

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (11.03.2019) – In 2018, more than 11,000 members of the Church of Almighty God (a new Christian movement with continuities to the Protestant tradition) were arrested in China for merely engaging in religious activities. It has been reported that twenty of them died during their imprisonment: seven of which were in so-called ‘transformation through education centers’, the same centers where one million Muslims from Xingjiang are currently detained and indoctrinated against their will.

According to information gathered by the Church of Almighty God (CAG), 23,567 of their members were persecuted by the authorities in 2018 for either attending underground religious meetings or for trying to share their faith with others.

Across thirty provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities, at least 12,456 church members have suffered harassment, including having their personal data collected, being forced to sign statements renouncing their faith, being forcefully photographed or video recorded, and having their fingerprints, blood samples, and hair involuntarily collected.

According to the report, some 6,757 members were held in

detention either for short or long periods; 685 members were known to have been tortured and 392 members were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The majority of individuals were sentenced to three years in prison, but eight were sentenced to more than ten years.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) estimates a total of 4 million members of the Church of Almighty God.

Since the Church's foundation in 1991, over 300,000 members have been arrested and at least 500,000 have fled from their homes. The report says that 101 known cases of death in detention have been confirmed by the Church.

The report details nineteen documented cases which demonstrate the CCP's use of arbitrary detention, torture, extra-judicial killing, propaganda against the CAG, and undue interference in applications for political asylum abroad.

The two cases below, taken from the report, illustrate the intensity of the repression (pseudonyms are used to protect the victims and their families).

Tortured & Humiliated, Aizhen's brutal story from a Chinese prison

On 9 May 2018, Aizhen (pseudonym) a 54-year old woman from Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province was arrested in a police raid.

While at the police station, three police chiefs took turns questioning her. The interrogation lasted from 5:00 p.m. on the day of her arrest until the afternoon of the following day. She was brutally beaten and humiliated, deprived of sleep, and was not given anything to eat or to drink. They wanted to know her name and her address. They attempted to force her to release information about the Church and to sign a document by which she would renounce her faith. When she refused to comply, the police officers took off their leather shoes and used them to hit her face.

On 16 May, the police transferred her to a detention center. They indicated to the prison guards that she was a believer of The Church of Almighty God and required 'special treatment'. While in custody, Aizhen was frequently subjected to beatings by both the prison guards and other prisoners. On three occasions she was handcuffed, suspended from a pole and beaten. Her entire body was black and blue.

The prison guards made Aizhen stand at attention facing the bathroom wall for over two hours every day and got other prisoners to watch over her. If they noticed she was praying, they would beat her. They pulled her into the restroom and pressed her head down on the floor, they hit her face, buttocks, and thighs with the soles of their shoes. They hit her all over her body. The inmates also beat and insulted Aizhen. Once, the head of the prison forced her to sit topless in the main hall under the surveillance cameras in order to humiliate and shame her.

Aizhen was released on 10 June. After returning home, her arms

hurt so much that she could not fully stretch them. To this day, even after several rounds of medical treatment, she remains physically impaired.

Tortured to death

On the evening of 13 September 2018, Miao Zenghua, a fifty-one-year old woman, was arrested at home in Dunhua City, Jilin Province, by officers from the local Public Security Bureau (PSB). She had a heart attack on the spot and was sent to the hospital for emergency treatment. After regaining consciousness, despite her health condition, she was taken by the police to the local PSB where she was tortured for a confession.

On 14 September, her family received a call from the PSB and rushed to the hospital. They discovered that Miao was not breathing. Big purple and blue marks covered her left arm and legs. They were clearly the result of terrible torture.

Her medical record stated that when an ambulance arrived at the PSB on the afternoon of 14 September, she had already stopped breathing and her heart had ceased beating.

Miao Zenghua had joined The Church of Almighty God in 2007. She was a mid-level leader of the Church. Once CCP officials learned about her position, they targeted her for arrest.

Moving forwards for justice

In 2018, Brussels-based NGO, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* contributed to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of China with a brochure titled **“Tortured to Death”** documenting numerous fatal cases of torture (See <https://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports/>).

On the homepage of its website, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* has published documented cases of prisoners believing in the teachings of The Church of Almighty God in China. At the beginning of 2019, the list, which is only partial, comprised **1663 prisoners: 1291 women and 372 men** (See <https://hrwf.eu>)

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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: Religious freedom report

ACN International (2019) – <https://bit.ly/2D66qHl>

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates situated in the Persian Gulf. Dubai is politically and economically the most important of them.

According to the constitution of 1971,[1] Islam is the official religion in the federation. Article 7 reads: “Islam is the official religion of the UAE. The Islamic Shari’a is a main source of legislation in the UAE.” Article 25 excludes discrimination based on religion. It reads: “All persons are equal in law. There shall be no distinction among the citizens of the UAE on the basis of race, nationality, faith or social status.” Article 32 reads: “Freedom to exercise religious worship is guaranteed in accordance with the generally accepted traditions provided that such freedom is consistent with the public policy or does not violate the public morals.”

Muslim citizens do not have the right to change religion. Apostasy in Islam is punishable by death. Apostasy is criminalised in accordance with hudud offences, which are based on Islamic law and incorporated in the country’s Penal Code. These include “adultery, apostasy, murder, theft, highway robbery that involves killing, and a false accusation of committing adultery”.[2] Article 1 of the penal code provides that Islamic law applies in hudud cases, including

the payment of blood money and murder. Article 66 states that the "original punishments" under the law include punishments of hudud crimes, including the death penalty. No one, however, has been prosecuted or punished by a court for such an offence.

The law criminalises blasphemy and imposes fines and imprisonment as punishment. Insulting other religions is also banned. Non-citizens face deportation in case of blasphemy.

While Muslims may proselytise, penalties are in place for non-Muslims proselytising among Muslims. If caught, non-citizens may have their residency revoked and face deportation.

Shari'a law is applied in matters of personal status for Muslim citizens and residents. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women 'of the book', i.e. Christians or Jews. Muslim women can only marry Muslim men. In the case of a mixed marriage between a Muslim man and a non-Muslim woman, child custody is granted to the father. Non-Muslim wives are not eligible for naturalisation.

Muslims and non-Muslims are required by law to respect fasting hours during Ramadan.

The government controls content in almost every Sunni mosque. Textbooks and curricula in both private and public schools are censored by the Ministry of Education.[3]

Christian churches may not be adorned by bell towers or have crosses on them.

In July 2015, the UAE announced new legislation for crimes related to religious hatred and extremism. These included the death penalty. A presidential decree bans any act that stirs up religious hatred as well as discrimination “on the basis of religion, caste, creed, doctrine, race, colour or ethnic origin”.^[4] According to the decree carried by an official news agency, offenders risk up to 10 years in prison or the death penalty if convicted of “takfirism” (declaring other Muslims infidels) or Sunni Muslim extremism.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, said the law “guarantees the freedom of individuals from religious intolerance ... and underpins the UAE’s policy of inclusiveness”.^[5] Jesuit priest Father Samir Khalil commented: “By doing this, the UAE has taken a step forward with regard to religious freedom, still the exception to the rule in Muslim countries.”^[6]

Non-citizen residents come mainly as guest workers from South and South East Asia, but also from the Middle East, Europe and North America. Although recent numbers are not available, the majority of residents are Muslims. According to the last census (2005), more than three-quarters of the population are Muslims, with Christians the next largest group.^[7]

The Catholic Church is present through the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (AVOSA) with its seat in Abu Dhabi, currently occupied by Bishop Paul Hinder. Eight Catholic

parishes and nine schools operate in the UAE. The number of Catholics is estimated to be around 800,000.[8]

There are also Protestant and Orthodox communities. In total, more than 35 churches operate as well as two Hindu temples. Given the large numbers of worshippers, they are often overcrowded.

Incidents

According to the International Religious Freedom Report for 2016[9], the UAE government continues to provide land for Christian churches (as well as Sikh and Hindu temples). It also provides land for non-Islamic cemeteries and cremation facilities for the country's large Hindu community.

In November 2016, UAE authorities held a conference[10] to discuss ways to promote tolerance and understanding. Religious representatives were among the invited guests, among them Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, the most senior cleric in the Church of England, and Dr Ahmed El Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al Azhar and president of the UAE's Muslim Council of Elders. It was decided that a union would be formed for youth from various cultures and nationalities and aimed at improving and encouraging tolerance.

In June 2017, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE armed forces, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, ordered that the Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Mosque be renamed "Mary, Mother of Jesus". This decision was taken in order to "consolidate bonds of humanity between followers of different religions".[11] The move to rename the mosque

reflects UAE initiatives to promote religious tolerance in the region.

In December 2017, UAE Prime Minister and Dubai Emir Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum declared that the pedestrian bridge over the recently built Dubai Canal be named "Tolerance Bridge".[12] He had previously tweeted that "Love and tolerance are bridges of communication and a universal language, binding humanity across different languages, religions and cultures". He added that "these are the foundations of the Emirates".

From 11th – 13th December 2017 the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies was organised in Abu Dhabi. Hosted by the Emirati Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the theme of this fourth round of the Forum was "Global Peace and the Fear of Islam: Countering the Spread of Extremism".[13] A joint cooperation agreement between the United Nations and the Forum was announced by Undersecretary-General and United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng. This cooperation consists in organising 10 research workshops to promote religious education in the Islamic world.[14]

Prospects for freedom of religion

One can expect freedom of religion to improve in the coming years in the UAE. Local Church leaders describe the atmosphere as friendly and praise the open atmosphere in the country.[15] George,[16] a Maronite Christian born to Lebanese parents, told ACN: "The UAE is a good place for Christians to live in. There are limits, of course, but respecting them [means] one has a good life there." The new law against religious hatred

is a hopeful sign.

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countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

CANADA: Femicide report: Woman or girl murdered every 2.5 days in 2018

A goal of the report is to acknowledge that circumstances surrounding women's violent deaths differs from those of men so that femicide can be better prevented

By Nicole Thompson

The National Post (20.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2MDr0TQ>– A woman or girl was killed every 2.5 days on average in Canada last year, according to an inaugural report on femicide that argues the issue must be better understood in order to reduce the number of slayings.

The first annual report by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability – titled “#CallItFemicide” – was released Wednesday and answers a call from the United Nations for countries to better track gender-related killings of women, said lead author Myrna Dawson, the observatory’s director and a professor at the University of Guelph.

“It really drove home how often this was happening when we were monitoring this on a daily basis,” she said. “Women are still most at risk of men that they are intimate with or who they should be able to trust.”

The goal of the report, at least in part, is to acknowledge that the circumstances and motivations surrounding women’s violent deaths differs from those of men so that femicide can be better understood and prevented.

“The context in which women and girls are killed is vastly different because they’re most often killed by people they know, and that’s in contrast to males who are most often killed by acquaintances and strangers,” Dawson said. “Calling it for what it is and recognizing the distinctiveness underscores the fact that we need different types of prevention.”

The report said 148 women and girls were killed in 133 incidents in 2018, with 140 people accused in their deaths. In 12 of the 133 incidents, no accused has been identified. Some cases involve multiple accused.

More than 90 per cent of those accused were men.

In many cases, a police investigation is still ongoing, Dawson said, adding that researchers intend to follow the cases through the justice system the coming years to better understand the factors that went into each.

The statistics include a van attack that left eight women and two men dead in Toronto last year. The accused in that case, Alek Minassian, has been charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 of attempted murder. He is set to stand trial in February 2020.

The women who died in the van attack are among the 21 per cent allegedly killed in 2018 by a stranger. By contrast, 53 per cent were allegedly killed by intimate partners, according to the report. Another 13 per cent were allegedly killed by other male family members.

That includes the case of Krassimira Pejcinovski and her 13-year-old daughter Venallia, who were allegedly slain by the elder Pejcinovski's partner in May 2018. Her 15-year-old son Roy was also killed in the incident, but is not included in the statistics.

The numbers and demographic information were pulled from media reports of the deaths, the study said. Dawson said information from the media was more handily available and at least as

accurate as information from official sources. But the report notes that in coming years, as these cases progress through the justice system, researchers will look at court records to track updates.

Dawson said there are some demographics disproportionately represented in the statistics. For instance, the report indicates Indigenous women represent only about five per cent of the population, but made up 36 per cent of the women and girls killed by violence. Thirty-four per cent of the women and girls were killed in rural areas, where only 16 per cent of the population lives, the report said.

Understanding these issues is key to preventing further femicides, said Julie Lalonde, a women's rights advocate and public educator.

For instance, she noted, funding for sexual assault centres and women's shelters is distributed on a per capita basis in Ontario, which puts women in sparsely populated areas at an even greater disadvantage.

"The argument is there's less of a need (in rural areas). Perhaps in terms of numbers, but you have a more complex need in rural communities that requires more resources, because you have to travel long distances. You don't have public transit for people to get away," Lalonde said.

She said statistics like those in the report also help cut down on misconceptions about violence against women, such as

the idea that women in abusive relationships should just leave.

“We don’t talk about things like criminal harassment or the fact that most women are killed after leaving or declaring that they’re going to leave a partner,” she said. “We have to challenge all the myths and stereotypes that tell women it’s their own fault.”

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**VIETNAM: NOW! Campaign 2018
report about Vietnamese**

prisoners of conscience

Latest Count: Vietnam Holds 244 Prisoners of Conscience

VietnamPoCS (03.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2LZCe4R> – Press release: According to the Now! Campaign, an initiative involving 14 international and Vietnamese civil society organizations, the government of Vietnam is holding at least 244 in prisons or similar forms of detention compared to 165 cases in November 2017, when the campaign was launched. This makes the country the second largest jailer of dissidents in Southeast Asia, only behind Myanmar.

The above number includes 224 who have been convicted, typically of political crimes such as “propaganda against the state” and “injuring the national unity,” and 20 others who are held in pre-trial detention. In addition, eight persons who participated in peaceful protests in mid-June of 2018 were given between five months and two years of suspended prison terms.

Many bloggers, lawyers, unionists, land rights activists, political dissidents, and followers of non-registered minority religions have been arrested and detained for peacefully exercising their internationally and constitutionally protected rights, principally the right to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of religion or belief. The list does not include individuals who have engaged in or advocated violence.

In 2018, Vietnam arrested 27 human rights activists and

convicted 40 activists with a total imprisonment of 300 years and 69 years under house arrest. In addition, 64 peaceful protesters were convicted in connection to the mass demonstrations that started in mid-June, where tens of thousands of protesters opposed the two bills on special economic zones and cyber security. The demonstrators were sentenced to a total of 121 years and five months in prison and nine years of suspended prison terms.

Thirty-two of the prisoners of conscience among the 244 identified by the NOW! Campaign are female. With one exception, all of these women come from the majority Kinh ethnic group. The one exception, Rmah Hruth, is an ethnic Jarai woman who was sentenced to five years of imprisonment in March 2014. In total, 186 people, or 76.6 % of the list, are ethnic Kinh. The second largest ethnic grouping on the list are Montagnards, a loose set of religious and ethnic minorities who live in the mountains of the Central Highlands. They account for 24.2% of those on the list. Seventeen of those on the list are Hmong people and two from Khmer Krom ethnic minority.

Most prisoners of conscience have been charged with or convicted of allegations under Articles 109, 116, 117, 318 and 331 in the 2015 Penal Code (previously Articles 79, 87, 88, 245 and 258 of the 1999 Penal Code, respectively):

- 45 activists convicted on subversion (Article 79 of 1999 Penal Code or Article 109 in the 2015 Penal Code);
- 23 activists convicted and five charged with anti-state

propaganda (Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code or Article 117 of the 2015 Penal Code);

- 53 people from ethnic minorities convicted for undermining the national unity policy (Article 87 of the 1999 Penal Code);
- 13 activists convicted of or charged with “abusing democratic freedom” (Article 258 of the 1999 Penal Code or Article 331 of the 2015 Penal Code);

- 78 individuals convicted of or charged with “disrupting public orders” (under Article 245 of the 1999 Penal Code or Article 318 of the 2015 Penal Code). Fifty two of them were imprisoned for peaceful participation in or being suspected of planning to participate in the mid-June demonstrations and their aftermath.

- The charge(s) for 16 individuals are unknown or yet to be announced by authorities.

Note that 25 individuals in the Now! Campaign’s report dated October 1, 2018, are not listed in the year-end report due to the limited information on their cases.

Background

In order to maintain a one-party regime, Vietnam’s communist government continues its intensified crackdown on local dissent by arresting and convicting many government critics, bloggers, Facebook users, non-violent demonstrators,

environmentalists, and social activists.

To suppress the growing social dissatisfaction, silence activists and discourage critics, the government has used controversial articles in the national security provisions of the Penal Code to arrest democracy activists and human rights defenders and convict them with lengthy sentences. Democracy campaigner and environmentalist Le Dinh Luong (M) was sentenced to 20 years in prison and five years of probation, the most severe prison sentence given to an activist in the past five years.

The communist regime has employed harsh measures to prevent street demonstrations and used allegation of “disrupting public orders” under Article 318 of the 1999 Penal Code to imprison dozens of peaceful demonstrators.

The largest wave of arrests in two decades

In 2018, Vietnam arrested 26 activists and bloggers. Twenty-one of them were charged under provisions of the Penal Code while the charges against the remaining five have not been announced.

– University student Huynh Duc Thanh Binh (M) was charged with “attempting to overthrow the government” under Article 109 of the 2015 Penal Code.

– Five activists were arrested and charged with “disrupting

security” in early September: Hoang Thi Thu Vang (F) and four members of the unregistered Hien Phap (Constitution) Group: Ngo Van Dung (M), Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hanh (F), Doan Thi Hong (F) and Ho Dinh Cuong (M). Security forces kidnapped all of them on September 1-4 without informing their families about their arrests and places of detention. They are facing imprisonment of up to 15 years if convicted.

– Five activists were arrested and charged with “making, storing or spreading information, materials or items for the purpose of opposing the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” under Article 117: Nguyen Ngoc Anh (M), Nguyen Dinh Thanh (M), Huynh Truong Ca (M), Nguyen Trung Linh (M) and Nguyen Van Quang (M).

– Nine activists were arrested and charged with “abusing democratic freedom” under Article 331 of the Penal Code: Do Cong Duong (M), Le Anh Hung (M), Nguyen Van Truong (M), Doan Khanh Vinh Quang (M), Bui Manh Dong (M), Nguyen Hong Nguyen (M), Truong Dinh Khang (M), and Le Minh The (M). Five of them were convicted and sentenced to between one and five years in prison while four others are in pre-trial detention.

– Charge(s) against Huynh Duc Thinh (M), Tran Long Phi (M), Do The Hoa (M) and Tran Thanh Phuong (M) have not been publicized. Police have yet to hand over their arrest warrants to their families. All of these dissidents have been held incommunicado during the investigation period. They are not permitted to meet with their lawyers, and their families are not allowed to visit them in person and must turn over to the prison authorities food, medicine and other personal necessities intended for the detainees.

In addition, Vietnam arrested hundreds of people participating in peaceful demonstrations in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Da Nang, Dong Nai, Nha Trang, Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, Binh Duong, and other localities on June 10-11. These demonstrators protested the National Assembly's draft bills on special economic zones and on cyber security. The first bill is believed to ignore the country's sovereignty and favor Chinese investors while the second bill is considered a draconian tool to silence online critics.

For the UN review of Vietnam's implementation of the Convention Against Torture, held on November 14-15, 2018, BPSOS and five other civil organizations had submitted a joint report detailing the police's heavy-handed treatment and arrest of peaceful demonstrators in June 2018. Vietnam's security forces have used plainclothes agents to kidnap dissidents and hold them for months without publicizing charge(s) against them or informing their families about their arrest and the allegations made against them. At least ten activists were so taken into police custody in early September, and they are still held incommunicado for investigation on serious accusations including "disrupting security" under the national security provisions of the Penal Code. Among them are bloggers Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hanh (F), Tran Thanh Phuong (M), Hung Hung (M), Ngo Van Dung (M), Doan Thi Hong (F) and Do The Hoa (M) of the unregistered group Hien Phap (Constitution).

In its Concluding Observations following the review of Vietnam's implementation of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in Geneva in mid November, the UN Committee Against Torture

urges Vietnam to “[g]uarantee that all detained persons are afforded, in law and in practice, all fundamental legal safeguards from the very outset of their deprivation of liberty, including the right to be informed immediately of the charges against them, to have prompt access to a lawyer or to free legal aid during all proceedings, to notify a relative or another person of their choice about their detention or arrest, to request and receive a medical examination from an independent doctor, including by a doctor of their choice upon request, and to have their deprivation of liberty recorded in registers at all stages...”

Lengthy pretrial detention and failure to promptly bring detainee to court

In many cases, activists have been held for up to 28 months in pre-trial detention. For example, human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai (M) and his assistant Le Thu Ha (F) were in pre-trial detention from December 16, 2015 until their trial on April 5, 2018. During the pre-trial detention, activists are kept incommunicado and not permitted to meet with their lawyers or relatives. In most cases, they may have access to lawyers to prepare for their defense only a few days before being tried.

The case of blogger Nguyen Danh Dung (M) is of particular concern. On December 16, 2016, authorities in the central province of Thanh Hoa arrested him and charged him with “conducting anti-state propaganda” under Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code. There has been no information about him since then. It is unclear whether he had been tried or freed or is still in pre-trial detention.

In its Concluding Observations, the UN Committee Against Torture has expressed concern about the lengthy pre-trial detention faced by human rights defenders and advised Vietnam to “[e]nsure that persons in administrative detention enjoy fundamental legal safeguards such as access to a lawyer or legal aid, the right to notify their family about their detention; and that their conditions of detention and treatment are not inferior to those of other persons deprived of their liberty.”

Heavy sentences

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Heavy Sentences

In 2018, Vietnam convicted 40 activists, 32 of them being arrested in 2015-2017 and eight in 2018.

– As many as 16 activists were convicted on subversion. They included eight members of the banned group Brotherhood for Democracy: Nguyen Van Dai (M), Nguyen Trung Ton (M), Nguyen Trung Truc (M), Pham Van Troi (M), Truong Minh Duc (M), Tran Thi Xuan (F), Nguyen Van Tuc (M), and Le Thu Ha (F); environmentalist and democracy advocate Le Dinh Luong (M), retired teacher Dao Quang Thuc (M) and five individuals alleged to be connected to the yet-to-be-established Coalition for Self-Determination for the Vietnamese People: Luu Van Vinh (M), Nguyen Quoc Hoan (M), Nguyen Van Duc Do (M), Tu Cong Nghia (M) and Phan Trung (M). They were given harsh sentences of 7-20 years in prison and additional probation of 1-5 years.

– Seven activists were convicted on charge of “conducting anti-state propaganda” under Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code

or “making, storing or spreading information, materials or items for the purpose of opposing the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” under Article 117 of the 2015 Penal Code: Vu Quang Thuan (M), Nguyen Van Dien (M), Tran Hoang Phuc (M), Bui Hieu Vo (M), Nguyen Viet Dung(M), Huynh Truong Ca (M) and Nguyen Dinh Thanh (M). They were sentenced to between 4.5 years and 8 years in prison. The highest sentence was given to Mr. Thuan and the lightest imprisonment was given to Bui Hieu Vo, an online blogger in HCM City. Some of them were given additional four or five years of probation.

– Four activists were convicted on allegation of “abusing democratic freedom to infringe interests of the state” under Article 331 of the 2015 Penal Code: Truong Dinh Khang (M), Nguyen Hong Nguyen (M), Doan Khanh Vinh Quang (M) and Bui Manh Dong (M). They were sentenced to 1 year, 2 years, 27 months and 30 months in prison, respectively.

– Do Cong Duong (M), an anti-corruption activist and independent journalist in Bac Ninh province, was arrested while filming an enforced land grabbing in February 2018. Later, he was convicted on allegations of “abusing democratic freedom” and “disrupting public orders” under Articles 331 and 318 of the 2015 Penal Code. He was sentenced in separate trials to 5 years in prison for the first charge and 4 years in prison for the second charge.

– Nine activists and 64 peaceful protesters in mid-June were convicted for “disrupting public orders” and sentenced to between 8 months and 6 years in prison.

Mistreatment in prison

In July – August imprisoned human rights activists Tran Thi Nga (F) and Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh (aka blogger Mother Mushroom) (F) were reportedly mistreated in prison. Ms. Nga was beaten and given death threats by an inmate. On September 29, Nga was denied of her family's visit. The last time she met with her family was July 26. Her family is concerned about her safety. Ms. Quynh was also threatened by an inmate and was given poor-quality food. She conducted a 17-days hunger strike that lasted from July 7 to July 23 in a bid to protest the prison's inhumane treatment.

Tran Huynh Duy Thuc (M), who is serving his 16-year imprisonment at Prison Camp No. 6 in the central province of Nghe An, started a hunger strike on August 14 to protest the bad treatment by prison authorities, which aimed to coerce him to make false confessions. The hunger strike lasted till September 16.

On August 16, 2018, appearing as witnesses at the hearing of Le Dinh Luong (M), Nguyen Van Hoa (M) and Nguyen Viet Dung (M) informed the presiding judge that their written confessions against Luong had been obtained through torture. They were both taken to another room where Hoa was beaten again by a senior police officer from the Nghe An province's Police Department.

The Ministry of Public Security apparently transfers prisoners of conscience to prison camps far from their families as additional punishment for those who refused to admit

wrongdoings. For example, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, and Tran Thi Nga were sent to prisons located between 1,000 km and 2,000 km from their families. Other documented cases are included in the following table.

No.	Name	Charge	Place of detention	Home location	Distance (km)	Period
1	Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh (f)	88	Prison camp No. 5- Thanh Hoa	Nha Trang	1,300	2017-2018
2	Tran Thi Nga (f)	88	Prison camp Dak Trung- Gia Lai	Hanoi	1,250	Currently
3	Tran Huynh Duy Thuc (m)	79	Prison camp No. 6- Nghe An	HCM City	1,400	Currently
4	Tran Anh Kim (m)	79	Prison camp No. 5- Thanh Hoa	Thai Binh	150	Currently
5	Nguyen Dang Minh Man (f)	79	Prison camp No. 5- Thanh Hoa	Vinh Long	1,600	Currently
6	Nguyen Van Oai (m)	88	Prison camp Dak Trung- Gia Lai	Nghe An	1,300	Currently
7	Ngo Hao (m)	79	An Diem Prison camp- Quang Nam	Phu Yen	500	Currently
8	Bui Thi Minh Hang (f)	245	Prison camp Dak Trung- Gia Lai	Vung Tau	1,000	2015-2017
9	Mai Thi Dung (f)	79	Thanh Xuan Prison camp- Hanoi	Dong Thap	2,000	2013-2015
10	Can Thi Theu (f)	245	Prison camp No. 5- Thanh Hoa	Hanoi	300	2016-2017
11	Ho Duc Hoa (m)	79	Ba Sao Prison camp- Ha Nam	Nghe An	300	Currently
12	Le Thanh Tung (m)	79	Prison camp No. 5- Thanh Hoa	Hanoi	210	Currently
13	Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung (m)	89	Xuyen Moc Prison camp- Ba Ria- Vung Tau	HCM City	100	Currently
14	Nguyen Huu Vinh (m)	258	Prison camp No. 5- Thanh Hoa	Hanoi	300	Currently
15	Nguyen Van Hoa	88	An Diem Prison camp- Quang Nam	Ha Tinh	500	Currently
16	Phan Kim Khanh	88	Ba Sao Prison camp- Ha Nam	Phu Tho	300	Currently
17	Phan Van Thu	79	An Phuoc Prison camp, Binh Duong	Phu Yen	500	Currently
18	Tran Thi Thuy	79	An Phuoc Prison camp, Binh Duong	Ben Tre	150	2013-2017
19	Le Dinh Luong	79	Ba Sao Prison camp- Ha Nam	Nghe An	300	Currently

Release from prison

Ten activists were released from prison this year. Nguyen Huu Quoc Duy (M), Dinh Nguyen Kha (M), Tran Thi Thuy (F), Giang A

Vang (M), and Vang A Long (M) completed their sentence. The first three are still placed under probation – they are under the close surveillance of local authorities during the probation period. After years in prison, their health has worsened; diagnosed with a number of severe diseases, they need urgent medical treatment to partly recover their health.

On the other hand, Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh (F), Le Thu Ha (F) and Nguyen Van Dai (M) were given amnesty but forced to leave Vietnam to live in exile. On June 7, Mr. Dai, accompanied by his wife, and Ms. Ha left for Germany. On October 17, Ms. Quynh was accompanied by her two children and her mother to the United States.

International responses

Vietnam's persecution against dissidents was met by strong international condemnation, particularly by the United States, the European Union, Germany, and the United Kingdom as well as by international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Along with calling on Hanoi to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally, the international community has urged Vietnam to respect international human rights treaties of which Vietnam is a state-party. The international community has also called on Vietnam to amend its Cyber Security Law, which in its current form would further restrict freedom of expression.

In its Concluding Observations dated December 28, 2018, the UN Committee Against Torture called on Vietnam to immediately cease all acts of torture and other forms of ill-treatment targeting persons deprived of their liberty, especially prisoners of conscience.

The term “prisoner of conscience” (POC) was coined by Peter Benenson in the 1960s. It refers to any individual “imprisoned for his/her political, religious or conscientiously held beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation or other status who have not used violence or advocated violence or hatred.”

The NOW! Campaign is a joint campaign initiated by Boat People SOS (BPSOS) calling upon the government of Vietnam to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally. The campaign is supported by 14 non-government organizations:

Boat People SOS (BPSOS)
Front Line Defenders (FLD)
Civil Right Defenders (CRD)
Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)
Defend the Defenders (DTD)
Stefanus Alliance International
Asian Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
The 88 Project
Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam (IJAVN)
Progressive Voice-Burma
Vietnam Women for Human Rights (VNWHR)
Campaign to Abolish Torture in Vietnam (VN-CAT)
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
Montagnard Human Rights Organization (MHR0)

For more information on the NOW! Campaign, visit www.vietnampocs.com.

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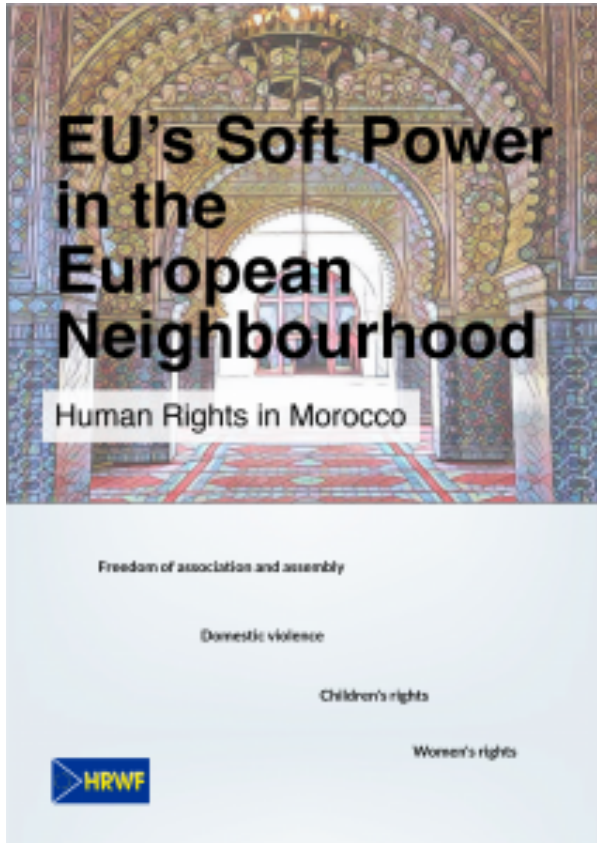
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Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/human-rights-in-the-world/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

Newly released: Human Rights in Morocco: Achievements and Challenges Ahead



Human Rights in Morocco: Achievements and Challenges Ahead

This report of *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l* first describes the mandate, the structures and the activities of the CNDH. This driving force, with 13 regional committees, has had and is having a real positive impact on freedom of association and assembly, domestic violence, woman's rights, and children's rights, just to name a few. Each of these issues is covered in this report, taking stock of the criticisms expressed by domestic civil society organizations and the international community, describing the dynamics towards positive changes, and outlining the remaining obstacles to overcome in order to achieve satisfactory results *de jure* and in practice.

[Read report](#)