

Joint Statement
Alleged Torture of Mrs. Tran Thi Hong Must Be Investigated

April 26, 2016

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To: President Tran Dai Quang,
Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, and
National Assembly Chair Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan
of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals call on the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to carry out a prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigation into allegations that Mrs. Tran Thi Hong was tortured by the local authorities of Hoa Lu Ward, Pleiku City, Gia Lai Province, while in custody, bring any identified perpetrators to justice, and provide reparations to Mrs. Tran Thi Hong. We remind the Viet Nam authorities that under international treaties binding the state, torture is prohibited in all circumstances and is a crime under international law.

As a result of the alleged torture, Mrs. Hong suffered multiple injuries. She is a member of the Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR), which in turn is a member of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and Asia Democracy Network, and the wife of imprisoned Lutheran Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh.

In the early morning of April 14, 2016, Mrs. Hong alleges she was abducted from her home and brought to the office of the People's Committee of Hoa Lu Ward, where for three hours she was interrogated and severely beaten by several plainclothes agents. At this office, two women pulled Mrs. Hong's hair and held her arms and legs while the men repeatedly kicked and pounded on her with their hands and feet. They attempted to extract information about her meeting two weeks earlier with a United States delegation led by Ambassador At Large on International Religious Freedom David Saperstein.

Allegedly as a result of the beating, Mrs. Hong suffered injuries to her head, knees, legs, hands, and feet, which have been documented in photographs. She experiences pain and difficulty when moving her arms and legs. She is also concerned about her head injuries, which cause pain even at a light touch.

On March 30, 2016, the same local authorities had also allegedly used violence to prevent Mrs. Hong from attending her scheduled meeting with the United States delegation. As she was approaching the building where the meeting was to take place, several plainclothes persons blocked her from entering the building and later beat her and forced her to return to her home. Ambassador At Large Saperstein and his delegation therefore had to visit her at her home, while being observed by the local authorities. Mrs. Hong later recognized one of the persons who beat her on March 30 as among those who beat her again on April 14 at the People's Committee headquarters.

We condemn what appears to have been reliably established as the torture of Mrs. Hong and call on the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to initiate a prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigation into the allegations of torture, prosecute any identified perpetrators, and provide Mrs. Hong with proper medical care and full remedies and reparations in accordance with Vietnam's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (**ICCPR**) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (**CAT**). Vietnam is a state party to both treaties.

As government leaders of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, you are in the position to take steps to ensure that national laws comply with international obligations and that such laws are properly enforced.

We also note that Mrs. Hong and her family have allegedly been targeted by the local authorities because of her husband's religious belief and practices. Lutheran Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh was unjustly sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment in 2012 having been convicted of "undermining national unity" under Article 87 of Vietnam's Penal Code. In reality he was arbitrarily detained and jailed for simply and peacefully practicing his faith and exercising his right to freedom of religion and belief. His peaceful activities in criticizing government policies cannot justify his continuous imprisonment and the constant harassment of his family.

We respectfully ask that your government immediately and unconditionally free Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh and show respect for international human rights law and standards. The community of civil society organizations and human rights advocates in Southeast Asia and around the world continues to follow the situation of Mrs. Tran Thi Hong and Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh with deep concern.

SIGNED:

1. Amnesty International – UNITED KINGDOM
2. Association for Promotion of Freedom of Religions and Beliefs - VIETNAM
3. Association of Con Dau Parish – VIETNAM & USA
4. Association of Former Vietnamese Prisoners of Conscience - VIETNAM
5. Bach Dang Giang Foundation - VIETNAM
6. Bloc 8406 – VIETNAM
7. Boat People SOS – USA
8. Brotherhood for Democracy - VIETNAM
9. Christian Solidarity Worldwide – UNITED KINGDOM
10. Civil Rights Defenders - SWEDEN
11. Coalition for a Freedom and Democratic Vietnam - USA
12. Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam - USA
13. Defend the Defenders – VIETNAM
14. Dieu Hau Magazine - USA
15. Evangelical Lutheran Community Church Vietnam-America - USA
16. Human Rights Support in Vietnam – USA
17. International Commission of Jurists - SWITZERLAND
18. Jubilee Campaign USA - USA
19. Movement of the Vietnamese Laity in the Diaspora - USA
20. Popular Bloc of the Cao Dai Religion - VIETNAM
21. Quê Mẹ: Action for Democracy in Vietnam and Vietnam Committee on Human Rights – FRANCE
22. Religious and Ethnic Minorities Defenders - VIETNAM
23. Thai Committee for Refugees Foundation - THAILAND
24. The Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) – CAMBODIA
25. The Nguyen Kim Dien Priests Group - VIETNAM
26. VETO! Human Rights Defenders' Network - GERMANY
27. Vietnam Human Rights Network - USA
28. Vietnamese Political & Religious Prisoners Friendship Association – VIETNAM
29. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights – VIETNAM
30. Honorable former United States Congressman, Joseph Cao Quang Anh, USA
31. Hoang Hung, Poet, VIETNAM
32. Nancy Nguyen, Human Rights Defender, USA
33. William Nicholas Gomes, Human Rights Defender and Freelance Journalist, UNITED KINGDOM