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Heavy sentences for Viet Nam labour activists condemned

Amnesty International has condemned the nine and seven-year prison sentences given to three activists in Viet Nam for carrying out their legitimate work on labour rights.

Doan Huy Chuong, Do Thi Minh Hanh, and Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung were today convicted and sentenced after a speedy trial yesterday for ‘disrupting security’. They had distributed leaflets and supported workers’ rights at a factory.

“The authorities should immediately release three labour organisers, and stop this needless crackdown on government critics and peaceful activists” said Donna Guest, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Asia-Pacific.

“Today’s harsh sentences, and the continuing arrests of activists and bloggers, paint an increasingly bleak picture of freedom of expression and association in Viet Nam.”

Doan is a founding member of the unofficial United Workers-Farmers Organization (UWFO) and previously spent 18 months in prison between 2007 and 2008 on the charge of ‘abusing democratic freedoms’. Do and Nguyen are members of Victims of Injustice, a petitioners’ movement.

The three activists are the latest to be convicted in an ongoing wave of arrests and trials of activists, organisers and bloggers.

There have been at least seven other trials of 17 dissidents in Viet Nam since September 2009, and seven further arrests in the last five months alone.

There have been two arrests of Vietnamese bloggers in the last few weeks: Phan Thanh Hai, known as Anh Ba Saigon and Nguyen Huong Tra, known as Do Long Girl. The prominent imprisoned blogger and journalist Nguyen Hoang Hai known as Dieu Cay completed a prison sentence for politically-motivated charges last week, but instead of being released, is now under investigation for ‘spreading propaganda against the state’.

Four more activists are awaiting trial for ‘attempting to overthrow the state’ following their arrests in July and August. Three of them - Nguyen Thanh Tham, Tran Thi Thuy and Pastor Duong Kim Khai - have campaigned for social justice for farmers, while the fourth, Professor Pham Minh Hoang, had protested against bauxite mining in the Central Highlands. All are members of the overseas Vietnamese network Viet Tan, which calls for political reform.

At least 30 prisoners of conscience are currently imprisoned in Viet Nam, including members and supporters

of banned political groups, independent trade unionists, bloggers, businessmen, journalists, and writers.

The trial, conviction and sentencing of the three labour activists comes on the eve of the ASEAN summit in Ha Noi, beginning on 28 October.

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