

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: ASA 41/9275/2018

18 October 2018

Viet Nam: Authorities must investigate reports of beatings at mining quarry

Vietnamese authorities must immediately order a thorough investigation into reports that guards protecting a quarry in Yen Bai province's Lâm Thượng commune physically assaulted local members of the Tay indigenous community who had gathered to protest against mine operations and what they see as its negative environmental impacts.

On 27 September hundreds of people from the commune, in northern Viet Nam, gathered to protest against RK Viet Nam's marble quarry, which they said pollutes their only source of clean water for farming and household use, and was also suspected of causing the deaths of a high number of poultry and fish.

The villagers also said they were worried about large rocks being displaced during the operations, a threat to the Tay community's villages located directly below the quarry, which previously incurred damage from smaller rock displacements. Furthermore, the mountain from which the marble is being taken has long been regarded by the Tay people as a spiritual guardian of the local area and its communities.

In response, security guards working on behalf of the Indian-owned RK Vietnam, contracted from a private firm, attacked the peaceful protesters with guns, batons and electric cattle-prods. At least 11 members of the Tay community – men, women and children – were injured according to media reports. One video of the assault shows the presence of rapid-response police, raising the question of why they did not intervene to stop the assault.

In the weeks since, local authorities of Lục Yên district ordered the mining company to temporarily cease their operations and hold negotiations with the community. Local activists reported that police officers visited their homes and demanded they delete posts on social media made during and after the event. On 4 October the local district president Bùi Văn Thịnh issued an official statement ordering the local police force to gather information about those who posted about the incident on Facebook.

Reports of the 27 September attack appear to be corroborated by video and photo evidence taken by those present, which have been provided to local rights groups and to Amnesty International.

Given these credible claims, the relevant authorities must launch an investigation into this alleged assault on civilians to establish the facts of the case immediately. Viet Nam's government should also take concrete measure to ensure that the environmental and human rights impacts of the mine and quarry are assessed and properly addressed, and provide restitution or, when this is not possible, just and equitable compensation for any lands and cultural heritage which was taken or damaged without the free, prior

and informed consent of the Tay indigenous people.

Background Information

Environmental disasters and other negative impacts have increasingly become a major issue of public concern in Viet Nam with activism occurring on a previously unprecedented scale, both in terms of frequency and number of people involved. In April 2016, Viet Nam's worst environmental disaster occurred: the Formosa spill disaster, a massive toxic spill from a Taiwanese steel plant which devastated the country's central coast provinces of Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, and Thừa Thiên-Huế and killed an estimated 115 tons of fish, destroying the livelihood of as many as 270,000 fishermen and tourism workers in the central provinces.

The government's investigation confirmed that a steel plant owned by the Taiwanese Formosa Plastics Group, located in Hà Tĩnh province, was the source of discharges of toxic waste into coastal waters. At the end of June 2016, Formosa publicly apologised and announced that it would provide \$500 million USD in compensation, but those affected have said that this is insufficient reparation for the impact of the spill and loss of livelihoods.

As protests and demands for transparency and accountability on environmental issues continue beyond the Formosa disaster, the authorities continue to respond with threats, harassment, prosecution, intimidation and physical violence against those involved in protest and in organizing and submitting complaints. Human rights defenders and activists involved in protests are increasingly being targeted. Hoàng Đức Bình, a local community leader in Nghe An province, was arrested, prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to 14 years in prison for helping local people make peaceful demands to local authorities that they responsibly investigate the disaster and support affected communities.