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Viet Nam: At least 14 arrests under the excuse of Olympic torch relay

Using the Olympic torch as an excuse to crack down on peaceful critics is yet another bitter twist in Viet Nam's pattern of repressing legitimate and peaceful dissent. Those arrested before and during the torch relay should be released immediately, said Amnesty International.

“Furthermore, the Vietnamese authorities must urgently investigate allegations of beatings against those detained, and ensure their safety and wellbeing.”

As the Olympic Torch relay made its stop in Viet Nam's largest city, Ho Chi Minh City on 29 April 2008, police arrested at least 12 demonstrators who had protested peacefully against Chinese policies. The majority of arrests took place Hanoi, over 1,700 kilometres away from Ho Chi Minh City and the Olympic torch.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at the ongoing campaign by the Vietnamese government to silence dissenting voices. Lawyers, trade unionists, religious leaders and Internet dissidents with links to emerging pro-democracy groups have been targeted since this crackdown began in 2006.

Earlier in April Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung urged the authorities to make the Olympic torch relay a success and ensure it would not “be affected by evil forces' distorted information,” according to state controlled media.

In the days leading up to the torch relay, at least three people were arrested, including Nguyen Hoang Hai, a journalist and blogger who had featured articles about protests against China's international policies. Most of those arrested on the day of the torch relay had voiced criticism against China about an ongoing territory dispute with Viet Nam over the Spratly and Paracel Islands, and about its policies in Tibet.

Background

According to reports received by Amnesty International, Nguyen Xuan Nghia and another arrested person, Vu Hung, a teacher, were beaten by police. Vu Hung is among four who have since been released.

It remains unclear whether charges have been brought against any of those who remain in detention, such as writer Nguyen Xuan Nghia and Vu Anh Son, who are reportedly held in Kien An district, Hai Phong province.

In breach of international human rights law the Vietnamese penal code criminalises peaceful dissent. Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the authorities to urgently reform provisions relating to

national security and ensure they are either removed or brought into line with international law. The organisation reiterates its calls on the Vietnamese authorities to honour its international human rights obligations by releasing all prisoners of conscience.