

Vietnam's Political Prisoners: Key Cases of Concern

1. Nguyen Huu Cau, serving a life sentence.



Nguyen Huu Cau, 66, is a poet, songwriter and anti-corruption campaigner. He has served a total of 34 years in prison since 1975, the first time from 1975-1980 in a re-education camp, the second time from 1982 till the present for exposing corruption by local authorities. He is reported to have been convicted of a serious crime against the state, under earlier legal provisions then in force in Vietnam. The prosecutor in his trial was one of the officials whom he had accused of corruption. Authorities used songs and poems he wrote as evidence of his “reactionary” activities. Originally sentenced to death, Nguyen Huu Cau is now serving a life term. During his time in prison he has lost most of his vision and is almost completely deaf. The only image available of Nguyen Huu Cau is shown above, taken several years ago during a family visit.

2. Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, serving 16 year sentence.



Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, 46, is a technocrat, a businessman and a blogger. The founder and general director of EIS/OCI, an information technology company that provided technology and phone services over the Internet, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc played an important role in pushing for development of information technology and the Internet in Vietnam. In late 2005, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc founded Nhom Nghien Cuu Chan [Research Group to Revive (the country)] to study social, economic and political issues in Vietnam. He also ran three blogs to post observations and analysis on current issues.

Tran Huynh Duy Thuc was arrested in May 2009 initially for evading telephone use taxes, but later charged with subversion of the people's administration under article 79 of the penal code. On January 20, 2010, the People's Court of Ho Chi Minh City convicted Tran

Huynh Duy Thuc to 16 years in prison, to be followed by five years of probation. At the trial, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc lodged a complaint that he was compelled to testify under force, but his complaint was ignored.

3. Le Van Son, serving 13 year sentence



Le Van Son (a.k.a Paulus Le Son), 27, is a Catholic blogger whose writing promotes freedom of religion, freedom of speech and human rights. Many of Le Van Son's blog entries reported land disputes between the local government and Catholic churches such as the Thai Ha church and the Cathedral in Hanoi and the Tam Toa church in Quang Binh. He also wrote to report the beating of his fellow blogger Nguyen Huu Vinh on January 2010 during a clash between Dong Chiem parish (Hanoi) and the local government. He has commented on human rights problems including police abuse and discrimination against HIV patients.

He has written articles and conducted interviews for *Vietnam Redemptorist News* of the *Redemptorist Order of Vietnam*, an unauthorized Catholic group which has faced continuous pressure from the authorities. *Le Van Son has also participated in humanitarian activities including taking care of HIV patients. He visited families of political prisoners such as Cu Huy Ha Vu and Phan Thanh Hai (a.k.a Anhbassg).* Le Van Son has been subjected to various forms of police harassment including intrusive surveillance, interrogation, and detention. Police harassed him when he tried to approach the People's Supreme Court to show solidarity with Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu during Dr. Vu's appeal trial on August 2, 2011; he was arrested the next day and was charged with "subversion of the people's administration" according to article 79 of the penal code, which carries a maximum penalty of death.

On January 9, 2013, the People's Court of Nghe An convicted Le Van Son to 13 years in prison, to be followed by five years of probation. Le Van Son appealed the verdict and his sentence was reduced to four years in prison and four years' probation.

4. Nguyen Van Hai (a.k.a Dieu Cay), serving 12 year sentence.



Nguyen Van Hai (a.k.a Dieu Cay), 60, is co-founder of the Club for Free Journalists established in September 2007 to promote freedom of expression and independent journalism. Ho Chi Minh City police detained and interrogated him for participating in protests against China on December 16, 2007 and January 19, 2008. On the latter date, police arrest and subsequently held Nguyen Van Hai in custody for more than 30 hours. Police again arrested Nguyen Van Hai on April 20, 2010, nine days before the Beijing Olympic torch traveled to Ho Chi Minh City, an event which authorities feared would provide a rallying point for activists and students to protest against China. He was later prosecuted on a tax evasion charge. On September 10, 2008, the People's Court of District Three in Ho Chi Minh City sentenced him to two years and six months in prison.

Nguyen Van Hai has been disciplined several times in prison. On December 3, 2009, his right to receive family visits was revoked. During the two months prior to his scheduled release from prison in October 2010, authorities did not permit family visits or packages. It is unknown what sparked the disciplinary measures, and whether they included other punitive measures routinely employed by prison authorities, such as placement in solitary confinement. On October 20, 2010, the day he completed his prison term, the authorities did not release him. Instead, authorities leveled a new charge against him of "conducting propaganda against the state" and continued to detain him. On September 24, 2012, the People's Court of Ho Chi Minh City convicted him of that offense and sentenced him to 12 years in prison and an additional five years on probation. On the day of his trial, Nguyen Van Hai's ex wife Duong Thi Tan and his son Nguyen Tri Dung were detained, preventing them from attending court to support him.

The authorities continue to punish Nguyen Van Hai for not admitting guilt. An appeal was turned down on December 27, 2012 and authorities have transferred him between prisons repeatedly to a total of nine prisons since his arrest in April 2008, making it difficult for his family to visit him. On February 1, 2013, police transferred Nguyen Van Hai from Bo La prison in Binh Duong province to Xuyen Moc prison in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province without informing his family. Upon arrival, Xuyen Moc prison cadres forced Nguyen Van Hai to give up all personal belongings that he had been keeping with him in the last five years

including newspapers, books, notebooks and pens. Apparently to break Nguyen Van Hai's will, prison authorities locked him in isolation for more than two months. On April 27, Nguyen Van Hai was transferred again to yet another prison. In June through August 2013, Nguyen Van Hai conducted a hunger strike to protest the conditions in which he and other prisoners were being held. As of this writing, his family has not been informed of his whereabouts.

President Obama praised Van Hai in a statement on World Press Freedom Day in May 2012.

5. Ta Phong Tan, serving 12 year sentence.



Ta Phong Tan, 44, is a former police officer. She began her career as a freelance journalist in 2004. Her articles appeared in many mainstream newspapers including *Tuoi Tre* (Youth), *Nguoi Lao Dong* (Laborer), *Vietnam Net*, *Phap Luat TP Ho Chi Minh* (Ho Chi Minh City Law), *Thanh Tra* (inspectorate), *Can Tho*, and *Binh Duong*. Since March 2006, dozens of her articles have been published on the website of BBC's Vietnamese service. This eventually prompted the Communist Party of Vietnam to revoke her membership. After launching her blog "Justice & Truth" (*Cong ly & Su that*) in November 2006, she became one of the most prolific bloggers in Vietnam, authoring more than 700 articles about social issues, including the mistreatment of children, official corruption, unfair taxation of poor people, and peasant grievances connected to illegal land confiscations by local officials. In addition, using her former knowledge and experience of police work, she provided insightful observations about widespread abuse of power by the police in Vietnam. Police continually harassed Ta Phong Tan as a result of her writing. In 2008 and in subsequent years, she was detained and interrogated on numerous occasions about her activities, her associates, and the contents of her blog. Ta Phong Tan was arrested on September 5, 2011 and charged with conducting propaganda against the state. Since Ta Phong Tan's arrest, police intimidated her family, pressuring them to persuade her to admit guilt. In an extreme form of protest, on the morning of July 30, 2012, her mother Dang Thi Kim Lieng set herself on fire, dying later that day. The police did not allow Tan, who was still awaiting trial, leave to attend her mother's funeral. On September 24, 2012, the People's Court of Ho Chi Minh City convicted and sentenced Ta Phong Tan to ten years in prison and three years of probation. During Ta Phong Tan's trial, police detained her sisters so they could not go to the court to support her. Her appeal was

turned down on December 2012. She was recently transferred from Xuan Loc prison in Dong Nai province to an unknown prison in the north, making it difficult for her family from the southern province of Bac Lieu to visit her.

6. Nguyen Van Ly, serving eight year sentence.



Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, 66, is a religious and rights activist. A founder of the underground *Tu Do Ngon Luan* (Freedom of Expression) and of a democracy movement in Vietnam known as Block 8406, Father Ly has been writing in support of religious freedom, freedom of expression and a multi-party system in Vietnam for more than 35 years. He has

spent 17 years in prison since 1977. His latest arrest in February 2007 led to a prison sentence of eight years on charges of conducting propaganda against the state. He was temporarily released on medical parole and put under house arrest from March 2010 to July 2011, during which time he published numerous accounts of torture in prison and urged people to boycott the National Assembly election in May 2011. He also continued to advocate for freedom of expression, freedom of religion, human rights and democracy. Father Nguyen Van Ly was sent back to prison on July 25, 2011 to complete his eight year prison term.

7. Cu Huy Ha Vu, serving seven year sentence.



Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu 55, is an artist with a doctorate in law from the Sorbonne. He comes from an elite family including senior members of the Vietnamese Communist Party and former revolutionaries. Vu is most famous for two lawsuits he brought against Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung: the first for signing Decision 167 in November 2007, which allowed controversial bauxite mining operations in Vietnam's Central Highlands; the second for signing Decree 136 in 2006, which

prohibits class-action petitions. In addition, Vu is known for his public criticism of high-ranking government officials, including Lt. Gen. Vu Hai Trieu of the Public Security Ministry, for allegedly authorizing cyber-attacks against politically sensitive websites disapproved of by the government, and the communist party general secretary of Ho Chi Minh City, Le

Thanh Hai, for allegedly confiscating land from relatives of martyred soldiers. He was arrested in November 2010 and tried on April 4, 2011 for violating article 88 of the penal code, which prohibits conducting propaganda against the state, and sentenced to seven years in prison. Upon completing prison term, he will have to serve an additional three years of probation. He carried out a hunger strike earlier this year, to protest the conditions of his detention.

8. Dinh Dang Dinh, serving six year sentence.



Dinh Dang Dinh, 49, is a former army official and a teacher at Le Quy Don high school in Dak Nong province. Since 2007, he emerged as an activist who used the Internet to promote freedom of speech and democracy. Dinh Dang Dinh's writing appeared on several websites including *Bauxite Vietnam* and *Dan Luan*. He has commented on social issues including problems in the education system and the environment and exposed various police harassment that he was subject to because of his Internet activities. He also signed a petition spearheaded by the website *Bauxite Vietnam* that opposes the bauxite mining on the Central Highland of Vietnam.

Dinh Dang Dinh was arrested on October 21, 2011 and charged with conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam under article 88 of the penal code. In March 2012, a formal statement was issued by the Obama administration stating "The United States is concerned about Mr. Dinh's arrest on the charges related to his on-line writings. We urge Vietnam to respect freedom of expression for all Vietnamese, including the freedom to express political opinions and to criticize government policies." On August 9, 2012, the People's Court of Dak Nong province sentenced Dinh Dang Dinh to six years in prison. His family could not afford to hire a lawyer to defend him. As of October 2013, Dinh Dang Dinh was hospitalized for gastric cancer.

9. Ho Thi Bich Khuong, serving five year sentence.



Ho Thi Bich Khuong, 45, is among an emerging and rapidly expanding group of farmers who use the Internet to defend the rights of landless poor people and to promote freedom of expression and freedom of association. She publishes detailed accounts of the

repression and harassment she and her family have confronted, and writes about the sufferings of other poor peasants and of human rights activists. In April 2007 she was arrested in an Internet café in Nghe An province and sentenced to two years in prison for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state,” under article 258 of the penal code. Her memoir of her time in prison was published in serialized form in July and August 2009 by *Nguoi Viet Online*, one of the most influential Vietnamese-American newspapers. On January 15, 2011, Ho Thi Bich Khuong was arrested again in Nghe An for conducting propaganda against the state. On December 29, 2011, the People’s Court of Nghe An sentenced her to five years in prison, to be followed by another three years of probation.

10. Vi Duc Hoi, serving five year sentence.



Vi Duc Hoi, 56, is a writer and blogger from the remote province of Lang Son in northern Vietnam, near the China border. He is an ethnic Tay, the largest minority group in Vietnam. Vi Duc Hoi quietly started supporting calls for respect of human rights and greater democracy in 2006, while holding high level positions in the Communist Party of Vietnam and government apparatus in Lang Son. He was the head of the Committee for Propaganda and a member of the Party’s Standing Committee of Huu Lung district. After his views became known, he was expelled from the party, subject to orchestrated public denunciation sessions, and detained and interrogated. His essays on democracy, pluralism, and human rights and his [memoir](#), *Facing Reality, My Path to Joining the Democratic Movement*, have been circulated widely on the Internet. Vi Duc Hoi was arrested in October 2010 and charged with conducting propaganda against the state under article 88 of the penal code. He was convicted and sentenced to eight years of imprisonment in January 2011, the sentence reduced on appeal in April 2011 to five years in prison to be followed by three years on probation.