



## **Nguyen Van Hoa** **Vietnam**

Nguyen Van Hoa is a journalist and activist serving a seven year prison sentence for activities related to his reporting and activism around the Formosa waste spill.

In April 2016, four provinces in central Vietnam (including Nguyen's home province) experienced the worst environmental disaster in the history of Vietnam - an industrial toxic spill from the Formosa steel plant in Ha Tinh. Although the corporation caused the spill by flushing cyanide and other chemicals into the ocean, the event became a political issue when the government moved slowly to mitigate the spill. The spill decimated the local fishing industry and heavily impacted tourism. Protests ensued in the wake of the government's tepid response.

Prior to his arrest, Nguyen was a videographer for Radio Free Asia's Vietnamese language service. He also independently published videos of protests against the construction of the Formosa plant and advocated for the rights of those injured in the incident. He was the first person to broadcast live footage of protests outside of Formosa's plant using a flycam drone. In October 2016, his footage of more than 10,000 peaceful protesters went viral. In November 2016, Nguyen was beaten by police and had his camera and phone confiscated while on assignment for Radio Free Asia.

Nguyen was arrested for drug possession on January 11, 2017. Nearly two weeks later, his family received notice of Nguyen's temporary detention, but with the charges listed as "abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State," per Article 258 of the Vietnam Penal Code. For the first three months of his detention, Nguyen was not allowed to meet with his family. He finally saw his family in April 2017, shortly after he taped a confession that was broadcast on television.

The government did not officially announce Nguyen's arrest until April 6, 2017. At that time, the charges against him were again changed, this time from Article 258 to Article 88 - "disseminating propaganda against the state" - a charge which carries a heavier sentence.

Nguyen's trial commenced in November 2017 and only lasted only two and a half hours. He was sentenced to seven years in prison followed by three years of house arrest under Article 88. The Vietnamese government claimed that the trial was open to the public, but only Nguyen's sister was permitted to enter the courtroom. Nguyen was not assisted by a defense counsel of his choice at the trial.

In October 2018, Nguyen was able to send a letter to his family which described physical abuse and ploys to coerce him into testifying against other activists in cases with which he had no connection.

In November 2018, Freedom Now and Dechert LLP filed a petition with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on Nguyen's behalf.