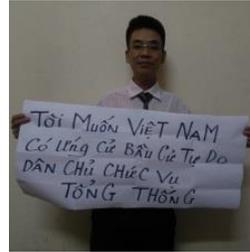


Tran Hoang Phuc, Vu Quang Thuan, and Nguyen Van Dien Vietnam



Tran Hoang Phuc, Vu Quang Thuan, and Nguyen Van Dien are pro-democracy activists detained since the spring of 2017. The three are serving six years, eight years, and six and a half years in prison, respectively, for allegedly posting anti-government blogs and videos online.

Tran Hoang Phuc is a pro-democracy activist and law student. Before his arrest, he attended the Ho Chi Minh University School of Law, where he was scheduled to graduate in 2016. He was the President and Founder of Vietnamese Students for Human Rights as well as a member of the Young Southeast Asia Leadership Initiative, a United States State Department initiative created under President Barack Obama. Tran has faced repeated harassment from the government. In May 2016, he was invited to meet with President Obama during a state visit to Vietnam; however police arrested Tran and detained him until the president left the country. In April 2017, Tran and a friend were abducted by plainclothes police, beaten, and left in a rural area of the country without clothing or money.

Vu Quang Thuan (also known as Vo Phu Dong) is a pro-democracy activist. In 2007, he joined a fellow activist in founding the National Movement to Revive Vietnam to advocate for a multi-party and democratic political system. After his colleague was arrested, Vu fled to Malaysia and applied for asylum. While waiting for his application to be processed, Vu organized protests in Malaysia and advocated for the rights of Vietnamese labor migrants. Vu was deported to Vietnam in February 2011 after threatening self-immolation during a protest. He was arrested immediately upon arrival in Vietnam and charged with crimes under Article 88 of the Penal Code. He was released from prison in 2015.

Nguyen Van Dien worked closely with Vu as a leading member of the National Movement to Revive Vietnam. Nguyen maintained a popular YouTube page which contained videos in which Vu openly criticized Vietnamese leaders for human rights violations, corruption, and a weak response to China's violations of Vietnam's sovereignty in the South China Sea.

On March 3, 2017, Vietnamese state media announced that Vu and Nguyen had been arrested. A week later, the government officially acknowledged the arrest and charged the men with violating Article 88 of the Penal Code for producing videos on their YouTube channel.

On June 29, 2017, five police officers arrested Tran at his apartment in Hanoi without a warrant. Authorities did not officially acknowledge his arrest until July 3, charging him with "possessing materials, producing and posting videos on the internet critical of the

government” under Article 88 of the Penal Code. In the later indictment the government alleged that in January 2017, Tran partnered with Nguyen and Vu in video creation, editing, and uploading. However, this partnership is disputed by other activists.

During their pre-trial detention all three men were kept *incommunicado*. Tran was reportedly tortured and interrogated at night, while Vu was told he would be locked in a psychiatric institution.

On January 31, 2018, the three men were formally tried for violating Article 88 of the Penal Code. According to the indictment, Vu and Nguyen were accused of posting 17 video clips on the Internet and possessing materials with anti-socialist state content; Tran was accused of helping them in storing the materials and posting three of the 17 clips.

The trial was replete with procedural violations. The defendants were only allowed to speak with their attorneys for about an hour before their trial. The court did not allow the videos as evidence, instead it relayed on statements from the Ministry of Information and Communication as proof that the videos contained alleged anti-state activity. Furthermore, family members and members of the diplomatic community were not allowed to attend the proceedings. After a one-day trial, the three men were handed sentences of six years, eight years, and six and a half years in prison, respectively. Their sentences were upheld by an appeal court in July 2018.