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May 25, 2018

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe  
Office of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet  
1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku  
Tokyo 100-8968  
Japan

Dear Prime Minister Abe,

We are writing to urge you to raise critical human rights concerns during your meetings with Vietnam's President Tran Dai Quang during his visit to Japan from May 29 to June 2, and publicly highlight the cases of political prisoners, as part of affirming that improving Japan-Vietnam relations will require improvements to Vietnam's human rights record.

As you know, Vietnam's government remains among the most repressive in the world. It restricts basic freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and religion. It owns and controls all media in the country and censors the internet. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) monopolizes the leadership of all public institutions and uses them to maintain its hold on power. Since it came to power in 1954, it has never allowed free and fair elections. There are no real democratic processes in Vietnam; its National Assembly is almost entirely comprised of CPV members selected by the party itself. The courts and all ministries are under CPV control. Independent trade unions are prohibited and social organizations, religious groups, and civil society are tightly regulated.

In the context of President Tran Dai Quang's upcoming visit to Japan's democratic government, it should be noted that he is the former head of the country's notorious Ministry of Public Security, which is responsible for the threats, arrests, and other abuses directed at political dissidents that are part of the methods CPV uses to maintain its hold on power.

As the largest bilateral donor to Vietnam, and as a large export market for goods produced in Vietnam, Japan is uniquely positioned to encourage the Vietnamese government to improve its abysmal human rights record.

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There are several specific human rights issues that you could raise during President Tran Dai Quang's visit, including limits on freedoms of speech and assembly, restrictions on the practice of religion and belief, incarceration of political prisoners, and violations of labor rights. We outline these topics in an appendix to this letter.

We strongly urge you to raise human rights in your discussion with President Tran Dai Quang and to pressure the Vietnamese government to initiate reforms. Many human rights activists in Vietnam are looking to Japan to affirm international norms, which they are taking great risks to promote. We urge you to affirm that Japan stands with the brave Vietnamese activists, and the public at large, in their struggle to obtain basic freedoms. We also urge you to communicate clearly and publicly to the Vietnamese government that if the country's human rights record does not begin to improve, Japan will begin reconsidering its financial aid to Vietnam as well as its economic, military, and security ties with the country.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to discussing these matters further with your staff.

Sincerely,

Brad Adams  
Asia Director  
Human Rights Watch

## **Appendix I: Critical Human Rights Issues in Vietnam**

### **Political Prisoners**

Vietnam's prisons currently hold at least 140 political prisoners. As you know, the Vietnamese government typically views those who advocate for democracy and human rights as criminals and threats to national security. During the first five months of 2018 alone, at least 26 rights activists and bloggers have been put on trial and convicted to long prison terms. Included in appendix II is a list of the publicly known cases. However, the total number is likely larger.

During President Tran Dai Quang's visit, we recommend that you raise publicly the issue of political prisoners and call for their immediate releases. While the release of each political prisoner is a welcome step, we hope you will also make the point that releases alone do not constitute lasting reform.

### **Beatings and Harassment of Activists and Dissidents**

We also urge you to raise concerns, publicly and privately, about the increasing number of cases in which dissidents and human rights defenders have been harassed or subjected to violence at the hands of police or persons who appear to be plainclothes government agents. In June 2017, Human Rights Watch published a report highlighting 36 incidents in which men in civilian clothes beat activists between January 2015 and April 2017, often resulting in serious injuries. Attacks by thugs on rights campaigners took place in many regions, sometimes in the presence of uniformed police who did nothing to stop the attacks.

Local police put activists under house arrest or briefly detain them to prevent them from participating in protests and human rights discussions or attending the trials of fellow activists. The government has also prohibited an increasing number of dissidents and human rights defenders from traveling abroad. Recently, in May 2018, the police barred human rights activist Father Dinh Huu Thoai from leaving Vietnam for a personal trip to the United States.

### **Legal Reform**

In your meeting with President Tran Dai Quang, we urge you to speak forcefully in support of freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.

Vietnam maintains an extremely repressive legal system. Its penal code criminalizes criticism of the government, while various other laws restrict the activities of religious groups, trade unions and federations, nongovernmental organizations, and media.

We urge you to express Japan's grave concern over some problematic laws and mention them by name—for instance, penal code provisions prohibiting “carrying out activities that aim to overthrow the people's administration”; “undermining national unity policy”; “conducting propaganda against the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”; and “disrupting security.” In June 2017, the National Assembly, which operates under the effective control of the ruling Communist Party, revised sections of the penal code to criminalize actions related to preparing to perform forbidden acts involving national security. Those found guilty face up to five years in prison. The revised penal code also holds lawyers criminally responsible if they fail to report their own clients to authorities for a number of crimes, including national security violations. Other laws, such as “abusing the rights to freedom and democracy to infringe upon the interests of the state, the legitimate rights and interests of individuals and organizations,” “disrupting public order,” and “resisting officials carrying out their public duty” are also used to repress the exercise of basic civil and political liberties.

We also ask that you raise concerns with the criminal procedure code, in particular provisions allowing excessive and incommunicado pretrial detention for alleged national security violations.

### **Labor Rights**

Vietnam prohibits the establishment or operation of independent political parties, labor unions, and human rights organizations. Authorities require approval for public gatherings and refuse permission for meetings, marches, or public assemblies they deem to be politically unacceptable. Independent union organizers face harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. The authorities convicted labor activists Truong Minh Duc to 12 years in prison in April and Hoang Duc Binh to 14 years in February 2018.

We urge you to make clear to Vietnam that it is imperative as a diplomatic and political matter that Vietnam move quickly to amend or repeal relevant labor laws to allow freedom of association and related rights.

### **Restrictions on the Practice of Religion and Belief**

The government monitors, harasses, and sometimes violently cracks down on religious groups operating outside government-controlled institutions. Unrecognized branches of the Cao Dai church, Hoa Hao Buddhist church, independent Protestant and Catholic house churches, Khmer Krom Buddhist temples, and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam face constant surveillance, harassment, and intimidation. Followers of independent religious group are subject to public criticism, forced renunciation of faith, detention, interrogation,

torture, and imprisonment. In January and February 2018, at least 10 independent Hoa Hao Buddhist activists were convicted to many years in prison.

During your meeting with President Tran Dai Quang, you should urge Vietnam to allow all independent religious organizations to freely conduct religious activities and govern themselves.

## Appendix II: Human Rights Watch List of Political Prisoners as of May 18, 2018

The following is a list of people imprisoned in Vietnam for expressing critical views of the government, taking part in peaceful protests, participating in religious groups not approved by the authorities, or joining civil or political organizations that the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam deems threatening to its monopoly on power. This list only includes people who have been convicted and remain in prison. It does not include the significant number of detainees who have been arrested and are currently facing trial, but not yet convicted. It is also almost certainly incomplete, as it only includes convictions that Human Rights Watch has been able to document.

Due to difficulties in obtaining information about convictions and sentences in Vietnam, this list may differ from those compiled by other organizations, and such differences do not necessarily reflect inaccuracies. Vietnam should be urged to open its legal system—including official records and proceedings—to public scrutiny.

1. Bùi Hiếu Võ, born 1962
2. Trần Thị Xuân, born 1976
3. Nguyễn Viết Dũng, born 1986
4. Nguyễn Văn Túc, born 1964
5. Nguyễn Văn Đài, born 1969
6. Nguyễn Trung Tôn, born 1972
7. Trương Minh Đức, born 1960
8. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển, born 1968
9. Lê Thu Hà, born 1982
10. Phạm Văn Trội, born 1972
11. Bùi Văn Trung, born 1964
12. Bùi Văn Thâm, born 1987
13. Bùi Thị Bích Tuyền, born 1982
14. Nguyễn Hoàng Nam, born 1982
15. Lê Hồng Hạnh, born 1979
16. Hoàng Đức Bình, born 1983
17. Nguyễn Nam Phong, born 1980
18. Hồ Văn Hải (a.k.a Dr. Hồ Hải), born 1959
19. Vũ Quang Thuận (a.k.a Võ Phù Đồng), born 1966
20. Nguyễn Văn Điển (a.k.a Điển Ái Quốc), born 1983
21. Trần Hoàng Phúc, born 1994

22. Vương Văn Thả, born 1969
23. Vương Thanh Thuận, born 1990
24. Nguyễn Nhật Trường, born 1985
25. Nguyễn Văn Thương, born 1985
26. Tạ Tấn Lộc, born 1975
27. Nguyễn Quang Thanh, born 1983
28. Huỳnh Hữu Đạt, born 1970
29. Nguyễn Văn Tuấn, born 1984
30. Nguyễn Văn Nghĩa, born 1978
31. Phạm Long Đại, born 1996
32. Đoàn Thị Bích Thủy, born 1972
33. Trương Thị Thu Hằng, born 1984
34. Trương Thị Bích Ngọc, born 1994
35. Nguyễn Tấn An, born 1992
36. Huỳnh Thị Kim Quyên, born 1979
37. Nguyễn Ngọc Quý, born 1992
38. Phạm Văn Trọng, born 1994
39. Nguyễn Thanh Bình, born 1994
40. Nguyễn Văn Hóa, born 1995
41. Phan Kim Khánh, born 1993
42. Nguyễn Văn Oai, born 1981
43. Trần Thị Nga, born 1977
44. Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh (a.k.a Mẹ Nấm), born 1979
45. Rơ Ma Daih (Ama Pôn) born 1989
46. Puih Bop (Ama Phun), born 1959
47. Ksor Kam (Ama H'Trum), born 1965
48. Rơ Lan Kly (Ama Blan), born 1962
49. Đinh Nông (Bă Pol), born 1965
50. Trần Anh Kim, born 1949
51. Lê Thanh Tùng, born 1968
52. Ksor Phit, born 1970
53. Siu Đik, born 1970
54. Nguyễn Hữu Quốc Duy, born 1985
55. Ksor Púp (Ama Hyung)
56. Siu Đoang, born 1983
57. A Jen, born 1984

58. A Tik, born 1952
59. Đinh Kử, born 1972
60. Thin, born 1979
61. Gyun, born 1980
62. Ngô Thị Minh Ước, born 1959
63. Nguyễn Hữu Vinh (a.k.a Ba Sàm), born 1956
64. Nguyễn Tiến Thịnh
65. Hoàng Văn Thu
66. Nguyễn Lê Châu Bình
67. Nguyễn Văn Thông, born 1965
68. Kpuih Khuông
69. Rmah Khil
70. Rmah Bloanh
71. A Kuin (a.k.a Bả Chăn), born 1974
72. Ngư (a.k.a Bả Săn), born 1972
73. Điều B'ré (a.k.a Bạp Bum), born 1969
74. Điều By Ơ, born 1967
75. Đinh Yum, born 1963
76. Rơ Mah Plă (a.k.a Rmah Blă; a.k.a Ama Em), born 1968
77. Siu Tinh (a.k.a Ama Khâm), born 1978
78. Rưn
79. Chi
80. Đinh Lý
81. Đinh Ngo
82. Thạch Thuởl, born 1985
83. Ngô Hào, born 1948
84. A Tách (a.k.a Bả Hlôl), born 1959
85. Rung, born 1979
86. Jơnh (a.k.a Chình), born 1952
87. A Hyum (a.k.a Bả Kôl), born 1940
88. Byưk, born 1945
89. Đinh Lứ, born 1976
90. Đinh Hrôn, born 1981
91. Đinh Nguyễn Kha, born 1988
92. Phan Văn Thu, born 1948
93. Lê Duy Lộc, born 1956



94. Vương Tấn Sơn, born 1953
95. Đoàn Đình Nam, born 1951
96. Nguyễn Kỳ Lạc, born 1951
97. Tạ Khu, born 1947
98. Từ Thiện Lương, born 1950
99. Võ Ngọc Cư, born 1951
100. Võ Thành Lê, born 1955
101. Võ Tiết, born 1952
102. Lê Phúc, born 1951
103. Đoàn Văn Cư, born 1962
104. Nguyễn Dinh, born 1968
105. Phan Thanh Ý, born 1948
106. Đỗ Thị Hồng, born 1957
107. Trần Phi Dũng, born 1966
108. Lê Đức Động, born 1983
109. Lê Trọng Cư, born 1966
110. Lương Nhật Quang, born 1987
111. Nguyễn Thái Bình, born 1986
112. Trần Quân, born 1984
113. Phan Thanh Tường, born 1987
114. Hồ Đức Hòa, born 1974
115. Nguyễn Đặng Minh Mẫn, born 1985
116. Tráng A Chớ, born 1985
117. Kpuil Mel
118. Kpuil Lễ
119. Siu Thái (a.k.a Ama Thương), born 1978
120. Phạm Thị Phượng, born 1945
121. Trần Thị Thúy, born 1971
122. Siu Hlom, born 1967
123. Siu Nheo, born 1955
124. Siu Broom, born 1967
125. Rah Lan Mlih, born 1966
126. Rơ Mah Pró, born 1964
127. Rah Lan Blom, born 1976
128. Kpã Sinh, born 1959
129. Rơ Mah Klít, born 1946

130. Nguyễn Hoàng Quốc Hùng, born 1981
131. Trần Huỳnh Duy Thức, born 1966
132. Rmah Hlach (a.k.a Ama Blut), born 1968
133. Siu Kơch (a.k.a Ama Liên), born 1985
134. Nhi (a.k.a Bả Tiêm), born 1958
135. Siu Ben (a.k.a Ama Yôn)
136. Rơ Lan Jú (a.k.a Ama Suit)
137. Nơh, born 1959
138. Rôh, born 1962
139. Siu Wiu
140. Y Kur BĐáp