

To whom it may concern,

I am writing you to bring attention to the current condition of Vietnamese activist Tran Huynh Duy Thuc. Thuc is an activist and blogger who has been fighting for human rights and the rule of law in Vietnam. Thuc is currently imprisoned in Vietnam for his activism, and is now in critical condition after undertaking a hunger strike for nearly two weeks.

Thuc's hunger strike is his response to the Vietnamese government's refusal to consider an appeal of his conviction - a request to decrease his prison sentence to a maximum of five years instead of the current sixteen, a reduction authorized under the 2015 Vietnam criminal code. Prior to the criminal code revisions, Thuc was charged and sentenced under Article 79 of the 1999 criminal code for "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration" for merely researching economic reform ideas with his friends. Thuc now argues that this research work should only be considered "preparation to commit a crime" since such social relationships are not political organizations. This charge would carry a punishment of a maximum of five years in prison under the 2015 criminal code. Thuc went on a hunger strike in October 2020 to try to get the court to consider his appeal, but to no avail; he went on hunger strike again in mid-November to once again try to get the court to take his appeal seriously. To date, the court has yet to respond to his appeal; it is likely that the court has not even reviewed the appeal, or that it has reviewed the appeal and is choosing to remain silent.

Having already served eleven years of his sixteen-year term, Thuc has served more than the maximum time allotted for the above alleged crime. He has also been confined to a prison a great distance away from his family and friends, limiting his ability to receive visitors and to have any communication with those he loves. This has no doubt contributed to the deterioration of his health. Thuc represents the front lines of the human rights struggle in Vietnam, an activist willing to put his own life and health on the line to bring attention and, hopefully, change to the human rights situation in Vietnam.

The court's refusal to hear and review Thuc's appeal represents the current state of legal affairs in Vietnam. Every day, Vietnamese activists like Thuc are shown that there is no true equality under the law and that the rule of law remains to be implemented in the country despite its propaganda stating otherwise. Thuc's health is being risked by a mere procedural issue, and he is being denied a basic right supposedly guaranteed to him under Vietnamese law. At the very least, Thuc deserves a review and response to his appeal; at the very best, Thuc deserves a full trial and, given that he has committed no true crime, immediate and unconditional release back into the arms of his family.

Tran Huynh Duy Thuc is an activist who has put his own health and safety on the line for the human rights of his fellow Vietnamese citizens. He merely asks that the courts review his appeal and give him a response as is warranted under Vietnamese law, but the court is refusing to follow basic legal procedures. This is a travesty of justice, a blatant refusal of Vietnam not only to follow its own legal processes but also a refusal to take human rights considerations seriously. I hope you will join me in pressuring the government of Vietnam to hear Thuc's appeal so that he may at least be afforded basic rights guaranteed to him as a Vietnamese citizen. Thank you.

-The 88 Project