

## [Report on Suppression of Bloggers Celebrating International HR Day in Vietnam](#)

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### **Summary**

This report, compiled by the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers <sup>1</sup>, aims to provide a full description of acts of oppression by the Vietnamese authorities against some citizens who peacefully exercised their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in celebration of the International Human Rights Day on December 10.

### **Background**

On November 12, 2013, Vietnam was elected by the United Nations General Assembly as one of the fourteen members of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the 2014-2016 term. It got 184 votes out of a total of 192, the highest among the candidates, and this was highlighted by state-owned media as “recognition by the international community for its recent achievements” <sup>2</sup> in human rights promotion and protection.

On the one hand, the Vietnamese government reaffirmed that it “fully respects and implements all its human rights commitments”. The Permanent Mission of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the United Nations, in a *note verbale* dated August 27, 2013, said Vietnam would undertake fourteen voluntary pledges, including “*Promote human rights education and training to improve the awareness and capacity of law-enforcement agencies to better ensure peoples’ rights and fundamental freedoms.*”

On the other hand, however, the authorities have attempted to shut down human rights activism inside the country and have been escalating their oppression of human rights activists, including bloggers.

### **Attacks on balloon release in Hanoi**

On December 6, 2013, the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers issued on its website an invitation to social gatherings, saying, “As Vietnam was recently elected to the UNHRC, the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers will organize a series of events to promote, foster, and celebrate Human Rights values.” The events were set to take place on December 8 and 10 in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. <sup>3</sup>

Shortly after the Network published its invitation online, all of its active members were put under tight surveillance by police forces and the so-called “social order defenders” <sup>4</sup>. The members’ phones were tapped, some of them were almost kept under house arrest. Among those were Nghiêm Việt Anh and Nguyễn Đình Hà, the two bloggers who went to Swedish Embassy in Hanoi on August 7 to hand in Statement 258. Nghiêm Việt Anh said he had never been followed so closely before with a team of police on guard in front of his apartment round the clock. Nguyễn Đình Hà was barred from going out, and when he tried to leave home for work, he was pushed back inside by the local police surrounding his apartment. Another blogger in Nha Trang, Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh (aka. Mẹ Nấm, Vietnamese for “Mother Mushroom”), reported that her Internet connection was cut off every week night.

Prior to the day of the celebration, a shipment of the Network’s T-shirts bearing its logo was confiscated by the police at the Hanoi railway station upon arrival from Ho Chi Minh City.

At the Network's invitation, a group of bloggers gathered in Thống Nhất Park in the centre of Hanoi to release balloons and disseminate human rights materials on December 8. The slogan on the green balloons said, "Our human rights must be respected." The materials included an article on basic human rights, copies of the UN Convention against Torture to which Vietnam is a signatory, and an article introducing this convention.



Photo by Mai Xuân Dũng

From early in the morning, the park was full of police, "social order defenders", and members of "government-organized local women's associations <sup>5</sup>." Plainclothes police were all around the place, and ten police lorries were parked just in front of the park's main gate on Trần Nhân Tông street. At around 3pm when the bloggers came and began to distribute human rights balloons and materials, they were quickly surrounded and outnumbered by these government forces. Dozens of police, social order defenders and women tried to push the bloggers away. Some women used megaphones to ask the bloggers to disperse. The electronic megaphones strongly suggested that these "voluntary" women had been well prepared in advance of the event.

The bloggers refused to leave, and when many young people, including children, eagerly joined the balloon release, the policemen and defenders reacted by pressing burnt cigarettes against the balloons, blowing them up. They also grabbed the human rights materials to tear them up. Some ran off after successfully grabbing the materials. Worse, plainclothes policemen and defenders began to hit the bloggers from their blind sides, then the perpetrators ran away or escaped into the street crowd, so that it was impossible to know exactly who beat up the bloggers and how. A female blogger, Đào Trang Loan (aka. Hư Vô, Vietnamese for "Nothingness"), 23, was punched many times from behind and even slapped strongly into her face.

Police lieutenant Nguyễn Vũ Huy, ID number 127-459, seized the rucksack of Phạm Minh Vũ (aka. Sep Pham) and ran off while people shouted, "Theft! Theft!" A footage showing this seizure and escape was posted online a few hours later and went viral on the Internet. <sup>6</sup>

Unable to disperse the crowd, plainclothes police and defenders made a collective assault against bloggers Lê Đức Hiền and Phạm Minh Vũ at around 4.15pm. Being dominated by these aggressive attackers, the bloggers had to stop their gathering. Even when they left the park at 5pm, the bloggers were still rushed by the police and defenders outside in the streets, their belongings taken.

## “Dirty bombs” employed

In Ho Chi Minh City on that same day, the celebrations of the International Human Rights Day were set to take place at September 23 Park, which lies close to Quách Thị Trang roundabout, District 1, centre of the City, from 5pm to 7pm.



As planned, at 5pm, about 20 bloggers, including Nguyễn Hoàng Vi (aka. An Đỗ Nguyễn), her sister Nguyễn Thảo Chi (Ms Sapphire), Phạm Lê Vương Các (Cù Các), Hoàng Dũng, Phạm Chí Dũng, were present at the location. Many pedestrians joined them and together they made a crowd of nearly 200 citizens. Then they were quickly surrounded by policemen, “social order defenders” and the “government-organized masses”, who would soon harass them and incite disorder to draw away attention. Old women, members of the state-controlled women’s association, tried to take the balloons and blow them up in their hands in the presence of many pedestrians, including children. Many copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were robbed and torn up.

The government forces became more aggressive when the bloggers were about to sit down in a circle to discuss the human rights documents disseminated. As at the previous celebration in Hanoi, they attacked the bloggers from the blind sides. Châu Văn Thi (aka. Yêu Nước Việt, Vietnamese for “Loving My Nation of Vietnam”), was hit from behind on his head. He was injured and his glasses broken. The attacker ran off quickly.

Nguyễn Tuấn Anh, a member of the Communist Youth Union, was filmed grabbing documents from Nguyễn Hoàng Vi, pushing her down and running away with the documents he stole. His acts constituted the crime of “property robbery by snatching” under Article 136 of the Vietnamese Penal Code, as jurist and blogger Trịnh Hữu Long pointed out later in an article on his blog. <sup>7</sup>

Worst of all, plainclothes police and defenders threw shrimp sauce <sup>8</sup> at people who they thought were members of the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers. The bloggers, stained with this kind of “dirty bombs”, were shocked and had to disperse in the end.

Nguyễn Nữ Phương Dung (aka. Miu Mạnh Mẽ) wrote in anger later on her Facebook page, “When we were just sitting and singing together, ruffians from all around rush in among our group, beating up Châu Văn Thi and throwing shrimp sauce at us... in the presence of many policemen and social order defenders who just stood there with their arms folded watching all those bad things.

Our rights were violated. We, the human rights advocates, were treated in such a rude way. We tried to be peaceful, we tried to be friendly to you, and you used violence in return. Why, so why did Vietnam try to win a seat in the UNHRC? What was that for?” <sup>9</sup>

## Assault and battery

Police crackdowns on bloggers did not cease. On the contrary, they escalated to a worrying climax on the International Human Rights Day of December 10 in Ho Chi Minh City. Around ten bloggers, who simply sought to exercise their right to freedom in a peaceful way, were brutally suppressed when they were going to attend a meeting to celebrate human rights values and the official inauguration of the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers.

Dozens of policemen, civil defenders and government-organized women's groups surrounded Nguyễn Hoàng Vi's apartment, who was with Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh (aka. Mẹ Nấm) and Quỳnh's 13-month-old son. At 5pm, when Vi and Quỳnh were about to leave - Vi for the meeting, and Quỳnh for home to take care of her son - these people rushed in the house and beat them up. The women punched, slapped Vi and Quỳnh, pulled their hair to drag them back in the house, and even snatched a teddy bear from Quỳnh's son, causing the child to cry in fright. It is worth noting that while these women were battering Vi and Quỳnh, the police and defenders huddled around to protect the attackers from being seen.

Nguyễn Tiền Tuyền, Vi's roommate, a seven-month pregnant woman, was also beaten when she tried to dissuade the attackers from assaulting Vi and Quỳnh. Some pedestrians, hearing the noises and coming to help, were stopped and pushed away by the police outside.



Facebooker Hoang Dung CDVN

Subsequent to the assault, which lasted for about 15 minutes, the police locked Vi, Quỳnh, and the roommate inside. Images and a video clip of the assault, posted by Quỳnh to her Facebook page [10](#), spread quickly and caused a huge outcry in the Facebook community. Some bloggers went to help the three women and the little child, and all of them were assaulted intensely by the police with fists and helmets. Blogger Hoàng Văn Dũng (aka. Hoàng Dũng), a member of the Vietnam Path Movement, was seriously attacked and the photo of his face in blood was really shocking. Blogger Trần Hoàng Hận (aka. Go Find Freedom) was arbitrarily arrested. He was taken to the police station of Ward 17, Gò Vấp district, and released after a few hours with his face swollen and bruised. Hận had to spend the next day in hospital.

Meanwhile, the meeting of bloggers in Ho Chi Minh City was canceled as many of its attendants were prevented from leaving their home. Some bloggers decided to move to a local church to continue the celebration. All of them were threatened by the police. Blogger Châu Văn Thi, 26, was stopped on his way home by some "strangers" who kept following him from days before. Only when Thi implored these "strangers" not to assault him did they let him go.

In total, there were nine bloggers seriously attacked in the Human Rights Day celebration in Ho Chi Minh City on December 10.

1. Hoàng Văn Dũng;
2. Nguyễn Ngọc Như Quỳnh and her son;

3. Nguyễn Hoàng Vi;
4. Nguyễn Tiên Tuyền;
5. Trần Hoàng Hận;
6. Nguyễn Lê Viễn Phương;
7. Võ Công Đồng;
8. Bùi Vũ Huy Hoàng;
9. Nguyễn Bá Tín.

During the assaults, the police did not give their victims any reason as to why they were beating them up.

In Hanoi, a meeting to celebrate the International Human Rights Day and inaugurate the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers was held in Thủy Tạ cafe at the side of Hoàn Kiếm Lake in the central area of Hanoi. Apart from the already confiscated T-shirts, a banner bearing the words “The Network of Vietnamese Bloggers celebrates Human Rights Day” was also confiscated at the print shop prior to the meeting. Everything went on smoothly, however, except that there was a sudden blackout, then the police came in and closed down the meeting in the presence of Jonathan D. London, a scholar from City University of Hong Kong, who attended the meeting and delivered a speech as a blogger and supporter of human rights and democracy movements in Vietnam.

Police forces kept watching the bloggers closely in the following days. When this line is being written, bloggers attending the Human Rights Day celebrations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are still put under tight surveillance.

### **Opinions by the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers**

So far, no reason has been given for all the acts of oppression, including harassment, confiscation and destruction of human rights materials, employing “dirty bombs” of shrimp sauce, assault and battery, and detention. However, the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers believes that the actions taken by the police and their “supporters”, including the social order defenders and government-paid women associations, were aimed at suppressing bloggers, especially active members of the Network, who were peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Further, it's worth noting that the way these government forces barred bloggers from going out of their homes, even rushed in Nguyễn Hoàng Vi's apartment to assault three women, including a pregnant one, and a 13-month-old boy, then locked them up, is an obvious violation of the right to liberty, security, and freedom of movement.

The Network of Vietnamese Bloggers believes that human rights protection is the duty of everyone, not just a group of people, an organization or a government. We believe that it is the right and an obligation of every Vietnamese person to contribute to protecting the human rights, including fundamental freedoms and democracy and dignity of our country's over ninety million people.

By disseminating human rights materials, the bloggers just wanted to promote human rights education and improve public awareness of rights, as stated in the fifth commitment by the Permanent Mission of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the United Nations in its *note verbale* dated August 27, 2013.

By holding gatherings in public sites, they just wanted to celebrate the International Human Rights Day given Vietnam's entry into the UNHRC, and to promote and foster human rights values.

By officially inaugurating the Network of Vietnamese Bloggers, they just wanted to announce

the establishment of a non-partisan and non-profit CSO who commits itself to protecting and promoting human rights in Vietnam and contributing to improving the respect for rights in the region and the world.

We strongly condemn all the acts of oppressions, especially violence against women and children. Suppressive acts by state-sponsored forces are causing social disorder, sowing division among the people, undermining community spirit, and smearing the image of Vietnam as a member of the UNHRC.

Source : [Phamdoantrang.com](http://Phamdoantrang.com)