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In Vietnam, crackdown on journalists in past six months

New York, October 3, 2011 – The Committee to Protect Journalists is alarmed by the recent crackdown on freedom of expression in Vietnam and calls on the government to immediately and unconditionally release all of the journalists detained in the country.

In the past six months, at least nine journalists, all of whom work primarily online, have been jailed in Vietnam. At the end of 2010, CPJ counted only five journalists in jail.

"With these arrests, Vietnam now ranks among the worst jailers of journalists in the world," said Bob Dietz, CPJ's Asia program director. "The crackdown under way underscores the Communist Party government's enduring fear of an independent press scrutinizing its record, policies, and personalities. The national security-related charges used to imprison these journalists are bogus across the board."

On March 26, independent online journalist Lu Van Bay was arrested after authorities raided his house and confiscated his computers and materials, news reports said. On August 22, he was sentenced to four years in prison and three years of house arrest on charges of conducting propaganda against the state, a criminal offense under the penal code's Article 88, according to press reports. The court's judgment specifically referred to 10 articles Bay wrote and posted on overseas websites – including *Dam Chim Viet* (Vietnamese Birds), *Doi Thoa* (Dialogue), and *To Quoc* (Fatherland) – that were critical of Vietnam's political system, Pen International reported.

In recent weeks, online journalists Paulus Le Van Son, Dang Xuan Dieu, Ho Duc Hoa, and Nguyen Van Duyet – all of whom worked for independent websites including *Vietnam Redemptorist News* and *Bao Khong Le* (Newspaper Without Lanes), which provide news and commentary forbidden in the country's state-controlled media – were detained under the criminal code's Article 79, which outlines penalties for activities aimed at overthrowing the government, according to Viet Tan, an exiled pro-democracy group. The maximum penalties for violations of the code are life imprisonment or capital punishment.

On August 3, Paulus Le Van Son, a private blogger and contributor to the *Vietnam Redemptorist News* and *Bao Khong Le*, was arrested by four police officials in front of his home in the capital, Hanoi. News reports citing an eyewitness said the officials knocked him to the ground from his motorcycle, grabbed his arms and legs, and threw him into a police vehicle. He is being held at Hanoi's B14 Detention Center, according to Viet Tan and news reports.

Dang Xuan Dieu, 32, and Ho Duc Hoa, 37, both social activists and contributors to the *Vietnam Redemptorist News*, were detained on July 30 at At Tan Son Nhat airport in Ho Chi Minh City. On August 7, Nguyen Van Duyet, 31, also a contributor to the *Vietnam Redemptorist News*, was detained in Vinh city, in Nghe An province. All three journalists are being held at Hanoi's B14 Detention Center, Viet Tan reported.

The journalists' arrests come amid a growing crackdown on dissent, in which dozens of social and political activists have been arrested. The suppression follows the enactment of an executive decree in February that gave authorities greater powers to penalize journalists and editors who report on issues considered sensitive to national security.

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