

RSF condemns Vietnam's latest legal crackdown on independent journalism

The Vietnamese regime has just adopted two legislative measures forcing journalists to disclose their sources to authorities and broadening the definition of state secrets arbitrarily. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls on the international community — specifically Vietnam's main trade partners — to pressure the authorities to end their policy of total control over the flow of information.

On 10 December 2025, the National Assembly of Vietnam [adopted](#) two law reforms that significantly strengthened the regime's control over information. The first is a revision of the [Press Law](#) that will allow the authorities to compel media outlets and journalists to reveal the identity of their sources in the context of investigations, prosecutions, or criminal trials. At present, only judges can do so.

The second is an amendment to the Law on the Protection of State Secrets, which expands the scope of information that can be classified as “secret,” allowing the regime to withhold any information that is in the public interest. Both revised draft texts were [presented](#) earlier in 2025, but the National Assembly has not yet published the adopted versions that will enter into force in the coming months.

“By targeting journalists’ sources and expanding the definition of state secrets, the Vietnamese regime is bolstering its legislative arsenal — which is already draconian — and further tightening its grip on information. This instrumentalisation of the law against the very principles of journalism cannot be left unacknowledged. The international community, especially Vietnam’s main trade partners like the United States, South Korea and the European Union, must pressure the Vietnamese authorities to repeal these provisions.

Cédric Alviani
Director, RSF Asia-Pacific Bureau

These amendments are part of a series of reforms designed to reinforce the state's control over media, [implemented](#) by Vietnamese leader To Lam since he came to power in 2024. They include a drastic reduction in the number of state media and attempts to further focus their content around narratives dictated by the regime.

A draconian legal framework

Vietnam's legal framework is already among the most repressive in the world. The 2016 Press Law *de facto* [prohibits](#) the creation of independent media and states that existing media outlets must “participate in state propaganda.” In addition, the regime has a legislative arsenal designed to suppress any journalist sharing sensitive information. Articles 117 and 331 of the Penal Code provide for heavy prison sentences — up to 20 years for Article 117 — for acts of spreading “propaganda against the State” and “abusing democratic freedoms.”

A symbol of this repression is journalist **Pham Doan Trang**, laureate of the [2019 RSF Press Freedom Prize](#), who is currently serving a nine-year prison sentence for allegedly spreading “propaganda against the state” in retaliation for her reporting work.

Since 2016, under To Lam's influence, more than 70 Vietnamese journalists have been imprisoned, often in life-threatening conditions. Twenty-eight of them are still behind bars. Vietnam ranks 173rd out of 180 countries in the [2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index](#).

