

# VIETNAM

|                                  | 2009       | 2011            |
|----------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS</b>   | <b>n/a</b> | <b>Not Free</b> |
| <b>Obstacles to Access</b>       | n/a        | 16              |
| <b>Limits on Content</b>         | n/a        | 25              |
| <b>Violations of User Rights</b> | n/a        | 32              |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>n/a</b> | <b>73</b>       |

**POPULATION:** 88.9 million  
**INTERNET PENETRATION:** 31 percent  
**WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS BLOCKED:** Yes  
**SUBSTANTIAL POLITICAL CENSORSHIP:** Yes  
**BLOGGERS/ONLINE USERS ARRESTED:** Yes  
**PRESS FREEDOM STATUS:** Not Free

## INTRODUCTION

The internet in Vietnam has undergone impressive development over the past decade, and is now accessed by over a quarter of the population. Since the medium's introduction in 1997, the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) has demonstrated concern that the internet could be used to challenge its monopoly on political power, leading to contradictory policies designed to support or suppress online activities.

In recent years, the government has invested in expanding citizens' access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), as seen in the so-called Taking-Off Strategy 2011–2020,<sup>1</sup> which aims to raise Vietnam's ICT sector to the level of its regional neighbors. At the same time, the government has intensified its efforts to monitor and censor online content. After a relative easing of repression from 2004 to 2006 as Vietnam prepared to host an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and join the World Trade Organization, the environment for free expression has deteriorated, and a growing number of bloggers have faced arrest, harassment, and imprisonment. In 2009, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) listed Vietnam among the 10 most repressive countries for bloggers.<sup>2</sup> In late 2009 and throughout 2010, a series of cyberattacks targeting a wide range of websites that were critical of the government highlighted an additional threat to internet freedom both within and beyond Vietnam's borders. The environment

<sup>1</sup> Business in Asia, "Taking-off Strategy," [http://www.business-in-asia.com/vietnam/vietnam\\_ict.html](http://www.business-in-asia.com/vietnam/vietnam_ict.html), accessed August 25, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "10 Worst Countries to Be a Blogger," April 30, 2009, <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2009/04/10-worst-countries-to-be-a-blogger.php>.

tightened further towards year's end, as the authorities prepared for a Communist Party Congress in January 2011.

## OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

Thanks to decreasing costs and the improvement of electricity and telecommunications networks, Vietnam's internet penetration rate has grown dramatically over the past decade, from 0.3 percent in 2000 to nearly 30 percent (25 million users) in 2010.<sup>3</sup> ADSL broadband access is also widely available and estimated to have five million users as of 2010. The internet's growth is largely driven by the demands of Vietnam's relatively young population; some 60 percent of the country's total population is under 35. Internet access points are easily found in urban areas throughout the country. In most towns, citizens can access the internet in their homes and workplaces. Cybercafes are affordable for most urban dwellers,<sup>4</sup> and WiFi connections are available free of charge in many semi-public spaces such as airports, cafes, restaurants, and hotels. Given Vietnam's 92 percent literacy rate, illiteracy does not pose a barrier to access.<sup>5</sup> The availability of the internet in rural areas remains limited, although programs backed by the government and international donors have increased access in recent years. Ethnic minorities and the poor live primarily in remote areas and are especially at a disadvantage.

Vietnam was home to 88.5 million mobile-phone users in 2009, according to the ITU.<sup>6</sup> The country's Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) placed the number at 110 million in early 2010. Although the figures exceed the total population, it is estimated that some 30 million low-income Vietnamese lack mobile phones, while others own two mobile devices or multiple SIM cards.<sup>7</sup> A third-generation technology (3G) network enabling internet access via mobile phones has been operating since the end of 2009, and the number of users is slowly expanding. As of mid-2010, there were at least 7 million 3G users.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Vietnam Internet Network Information Center, "Report on Internet Statistics of Vietnam," September 2010, [http://www.thongkeinternet.vn/jsp/theyjoi/dna\\_tab.jsp](http://www.thongkeinternet.vn/jsp/theyjoi/dna_tab.jsp). International Telecommunication Union (ITU) shows the penetration rate at approximately 27 percent (23 million users) as of 2009. For more information see "ICT Statistics 2009—Internet," <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> "Vietnam: 20% Do Not Trust Internet Information," P.A News, April 15, 2010, <http://news.pavietnam.vn/archives/1547> (in Vietnamese).

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, "At a Glance: Vietnam," [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/vietnam\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/vietnam_statistics.html), accessed August 25, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> International Telecommunication Union, "ICT Statistics 2009—Mobile Cellular Subscriptions," <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx>, accessed August 25, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> "Mobile Subscribers Touch 110 Million in 2009," Viet Nam Business News, March 7, 2010, <http://vietnambusiness.asia/mobile-subscribers-touch-110-million-in-2009/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ha Phuong, "Mobile Operators Magnify Numbers of 3G Subscribers," Look at Vietnam, June 12, 2010, <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2010/06/mobile-operators-magnify-numbers-of-3g-subscribers.html>.

The video-sharing website YouTube, the microblogging application Twitter, and international blog-hosting services are freely available and growing in popularity. However, in September 2009 an order in which the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) instructed internet-service providers (ISPs) to block Facebook, which had roughly a million users in Vietnam at the time,<sup>9</sup> began circulating online.<sup>10</sup> By November, users were reporting difficulty accessing the website. It remained sporadically inaccessible throughout 2010, but the government refused to officially acknowledge trying to block.<sup>11</sup> While no laws prohibit the use of circumvention tools, a 2008 decree makes it illegal to access blocked websites.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, information on circumventing the block on Facebook circulated fairly widely, including via videos and blog posts.<sup>13</sup> As such, by the end of 2010, the number of Facebook users in Vietnam had increased to nearly 2 million despite the block,<sup>14</sup> though some users complained that previous, relatively simple methods of circumvention were becoming less effective. Zing Me, a domestic social networking site, had five million users by early 2011.<sup>15</sup> In May 2010, the Ministry of Information and Culture (MIC) also launched a government-backed social network called Go VN, where users must register with their real name and government-issued identity number when creating an account; the initial response to the new initiative was limited.<sup>16</sup>

The three biggest ISPs are the state-owned Vietnam Post and Telecommunications (VNPT), which holds 74 percent of the market, the military-owned Viettel (11 percent), and the privately owned FPT (10 percent). VNPT and Viettel also own the three largest mobile-phone service providers in the country (MobiFone, VinaPhone, and Viettel), which reportedly serve 100 million of Vietnam's 110 million users. Four privately owned companies share the remainder.<sup>17</sup> While there is no legally imposed monopoly for access providers, informal practices create hurdles for new companies seeking to enter the market,

<sup>9</sup> An Khanh, "Online Business to Attract Young," Radio Free Asia, July 21, 2010, [http://www.rfamobile.org/vietnamese/in\\_depth/vietnamese-youth-is-attracted-to-do-business-on-facebook-KAn-07212010160732.html](http://www.rfamobile.org/vietnamese/in_depth/vietnamese-youth-is-attracted-to-do-business-on-facebook-KAn-07212010160732.html) (in Vietnamese).

<sup>10</sup> Viet Tan, "Decree to Block Facebook in Vietnam," September 1, 2010, <http://www.viettan.org/spip.php?article9390>; "Vietnam Is No Longer Friends with Facebook," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, December 21, 2009, available at <http://www.viettan.org/spip.php?article9335>.

<sup>11</sup> "Vietnam to Block Facebook," CNN iReport, November 10, 2009, <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-354181>.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Information and Communications, Decree 97/2008/NĐ-CP, "Regarding the management, provision and use of Internet services and electronic information on the internet," issued August 28, 2008, <http://mic.gov.vn/VBQPPL/vn/documentdetail/8769/index.mic>.

<sup>13</sup> Brannon Cullum, "Spotlighting Digital Activism in Vietnam," Movements.org, November 2, 2010, <http://www.movements.org/blog/entry/spotlighting-digital-activism-in-vietnam/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Vietnam Facebook Statistics," Socialbakers, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/vietnam>, accessed February 24, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Huyen Chip, "Vietnam: State of Social Media One Year After Facebook Block," Global Voices, January 25, 2011, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/01/25/vietnam-state-of-social-media-one-year-after-facebook-block/>.

<sup>16</sup> James Hookway, "In Vietnam, State 'Friends' You," *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703305004575503561540612900.html>.

<sup>17</sup> "2010: What Will the Mobile Communication Market Be Like?" Hanoimoi Online, March 5, 2010, [http://www.hanoimoi.com.vn/newsdetail/Kinh\\_te/312116/nam-2010-thi-truong-thong-tin-di-dong-se-ra-sao.htm](http://www.hanoimoi.com.vn/newsdetail/Kinh_te/312116/nam-2010-thi-truong-thong-tin-di-dong-se-ra-sao.htm) (in Vietnamese); "Mobile Subscribers Touch 110 Million in 2009," Viet Nam Business News.

and many find that they lack the political ties or economic clout to do so. Similarly, there is a concentration of internet-exchange providers (IXPs), which serve as gateways to the international internet. Currently there are seven IXPs, five of which are state- or military-owned.<sup>18</sup>

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPT), the MPS, and the Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism (MCST) regulate the management, provision, and usage of internet services. On paper, the MCST is charged with regulating sexual or violent content, while the MPS oversees measures related to politically sensitive content. In practice, however, the ruling VCP issues guidelines to all regulatory bodies as it deems appropriate and in a largely nontransparent manner. The Vietnam Internet Network Information Center (VNNIC), run by the MPT, manages and allocates internet resources such as domain names.<sup>19</sup>

## LIMITS ON CONTENT

While the Vietnamese government has fewer resources to devote to online content control than its counterpart in China, the authorities have nonetheless established an effective and increasingly sophisticated content-filtering system. Censorship of online content is implemented by ISPs rather than at the backbone level or the international gateway. There is no real-time filtering based on keywords or using deep-packet inspection. Instead, specific URLs are identified in advance as targets for censorship and placed on blacklists; ISPs are legally required to block these URLs. In some instances, when users attempt to access a censored website, a “blocked page” notification will appear, informing them that the page has been deliberately blocked rather than rendered unavailable by a technical failure. However, users sometimes receive a vague error message indicating simply that the browser was unable to locate the server for that website.

Although the censorship system is ostensibly aimed at limiting access to sexually explicit content, in practice it primarily targets sites deemed threatening to the VCP’s monopoly on political power, such as those related to Vietnamese political dissidents, human rights, and democracy. Websites on religious freedom, Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, and the Cao Dai religious group are blocked to a lesser but still significant degree.<sup>20</sup> The Vietnamese authorities largely focus their censorship efforts on Vietnamese-language content, blocking English-language sites less often. For example, while the

<sup>18</sup> The five are VNPT, Viettel, EVN Telecom, Hanoi Telecom, and VTC.

<sup>19</sup> Vietnam Internet Network Information Center, “Regulation on Registrar of Domain Name Dot Vn,” March 5, 2007, <http://www.vnnic.vn/english/5-6-300-0-2-01-20071115.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> “Vietnamese Government Expands Internet Censorship to Block Catholic Websites,” Catholic News Agency, August 6, 2009, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/vietnamese-government-expands-internet-censorship-to-block-catholic-websites/>.

websites of the *New York Times*, the British Broadcasting Corporation, Freedom House, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch are accessible, those of overseas Vietnamese organizations that are critical of the government—such as talawas.org, danluan.org, or danchimviet.com—are blocked. The websites of the Vietnamese-language services of the U.S.-funded Radio Free Asia and Voice of America outlets are also sporadically blocked.

In recent years, the online filtering apparatus has expanded. Both the social-networking website Facebook and content related to border disputes between China and Vietnam, for example, were freely available several years ago but were restricted as of the end of 2010. Because of the unpredictable and nontransparent way in which topics become forbidden, it is difficult for users to know where exactly the “red lines” lie. As a result, many media workers and online writers practice self-censorship or publish under pseudonyms. One common form of self-censorship is for bloggers to disable the readers’ comment option on their writings. This acts as a precautionary measure to prevent discussion by commentators from taking a more confrontational tone than what was intended by the original posting.

Online media outlets and internet portals are state owned and therefore subject to censorship by the VCP. The party’s Department for Culture and Ideology and the MPS regularly instruct online newspapers or portals to remove content they perceive as critical of the government. Editors and journalists who post such content risk disciplinary warnings, job loss, or even imprisonment. In October 2008, the MIC announced the creation of the Administrative Agency for Radio, Television, and Electronic Information. Among other duties, the agency was tasked with regulating online content, including by drafting guidelines for blogs, though the full extent of its activities remained unclear as of the end of 2010.<sup>21</sup> In December 2008, the MIC announced a directive requiring blogging platforms to remove “harmful” content, report to the government every six months, and provide information about individual bloggers upon request.<sup>22</sup> This has generally resulted in an increase in the censorship of content that is critical of the VCP, but the impact has been less significant on the many blogs hosted outside the country. In late 2008, the deputy minister of information and communications reportedly said he would contact international companies such as Google and Yahoo! to request cooperation on censorship. However, as of 2010 there were no indications that these companies were assisting the Vietnamese authorities, for instance by self-censoring search results, as is done in China.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Cain, “Bloggers the New Rebels in Vietnam,” SFGate.com, December 14, 2008, [http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-12-14/news/17131885\\_1\\_bloggers-communist-party-vietnam](http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-12-14/news/17131885_1_bloggers-communist-party-vietnam); Xuan Linh, “Watchdog to Regulate Blogs in Vietnam,” VietnamNet Bridge, October 3, 2008, <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/politics/2008/10/806781/>.

<sup>22</sup> Karin Deutsch Karlekar, ed., “Vietnam,” in *Freedom of the Press 2009* (New York: Freedom House, 2009), <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009>.

<sup>23</sup> Ann Binlot, “Vietnam’s Bloggers Face Government Crackdown,” *Time*, December 30, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1869130,00.html>.

There is no avenue for managers of blocked websites to appeal censorship decisions. There have been no reports of restrictions placed on content transmitted via e-mail or mobile-phone text messages.

Despite the government restrictions, Vietnam's internet is vibrant and offers a diversity of content in the Vietnamese language, though most of it is nonpolitical. According to the MIC, there were 1.1 million blogs in Vietnam as of October 2008.<sup>24</sup> In recent years, Yahoo! 360 emerged as an extremely popular platform for the blogging community, and for individual bloggers writing on entertainment, fashion, or politics to gain a large number of followers. At the height of its popularity, the application reportedly had 15 million Vietnamese users, including 2 million who updated their pages daily.<sup>25</sup> However, as the program was not particularly popular outside Vietnam, in mid-2009 Yahoo! terminated the service. Since then, Vietnam's blogging community has become much more dispersed, with some bloggers migrating to Blogger.com or WordPress.com, others to Yahoo!'s 360Plus, and especially to Facebook and Multiply. Between May 2009 and November 2009, shortly before the government restricted access to Facebook, the number of Facebook users from Vietnam reportedly increased from 72,000 to one million.<sup>26</sup>

Although most blogs address personal or nonpolitical topics, citizen journalism has emerged as an important phenomenon and a source of information for many Vietnamese, particularly given the VCP's tight control over traditional media. Websites such as Vietnam Net and Vietnam News discuss subjects like corruption, social justice, and the country's political situation. According to one study, citizen journalists in recent years have exposed stories such as blunders by the Ministry of Construction surrounding a bridge collapse, corruption in transportation projects funded by Japanese foreign aid, and police brutality against farmers protesting against land grabs.<sup>27</sup> Blogs and online writings have also played a critical role in mobilizing public opinion and even "real life" protests over environmental concerns related to mining projects in the Central Highlands, and disputes with China over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. In early 2009, a petition was circulated calling on the authorities to reconsider plans to mine the mineral bauxite in cooperation with a Chinese state-owned company. The petition garnered thousands of signatures. The campaign organizers then launched a website called Bauxite Vietnam that attracted millions of hits, although it is hosted on a server in France.<sup>28</sup> Some bloggers and activists also used the internet to distribute t-shirts criticizing the bauxite policy and China's claims to the disputed

<sup>24</sup> Linh, "Watchdog to Regulate Blogs in Vietnam."

<sup>25</sup> Aryeh Sternberg, "Vietnam Online: Then and Now," iMedia Connection, January 5, 2010, <http://www.imediaconnection.com/content/25480.asp>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Viet Tan, "Vietnam's Blogger Movement: A Virtual Civil Society in the Midst of Government Repression," March 30, 2009, <http://www.viettan.org/spip.php?article8421>.

<sup>28</sup> Viet Tan, "Denial of Service: Cyberattacks by the Vietnamese Government," April 27, 2010, <http://www.viettan.org/spip.php?article9749>. The Bauxite Vietnam website is located at <http://www.bauxitevietnam.info>.

islands.<sup>29</sup> Methods to circumvent censorship, such as the use of proxy servers, are relatively well-known among the young and technology-savvy internet users in Vietnam, with some searchable via Google.

## VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

The constitution affirms the right to freedom of expression, but media are strictly controlled by the VCP in practice. Legislation including internet-related decrees, the penal code, the Publishing Law, and the State Secrets Protection Ordinance restrict free expression, and have been used to imprison journalists and bloggers. The judiciary is not independent, and many trials related to free expression last only a few hours. When detaining bloggers and online activists, police routinely fail to follow Vietnamese legal provisions, arresting individuals without a warrant, or retaining them in custody beyond the maximum period allowed by law. In an effort to expand traditional media controls to the blogosphere, the MIC issued Circular 7 in December 2008. It requires blogs to address only strictly personal information, and refrain from political or social commentary. It also bars internet users from disseminating press articles, literary works, or other publications that are prohibited by the Press Law.<sup>30</sup>

In recent years, the Vietnamese authorities have embarked on several crackdowns against bloggers and online writers, subjecting them to extended interrogations, imprisonment, and in some instances physical abuse.<sup>31</sup> In one of the first cases of a prominent blogger being imprisoned, Dieu Cay, a vocal critic of the government's human rights record and an advocate for Vietnamese sovereignty over the Spratly Islands, was sentenced in late 2008 to 2.5 years in prison on tax evasion charges that most observers viewed as politically motivated.<sup>32</sup> Other bloggers have been prosecuted and convicted for "subversion" or "attempting to overthrow the people's government." The authorities have also invoked Articles 79 and 88 of the penal code to imprison bloggers and online activists.<sup>33</sup> In January 2010, a court in Ho Chi Minh City sentenced four prodemocracy activists to a total of 33 years in prison for using the internet to report rights violations or disseminate pro-democracy views. Of the four, Le Cong Dinh and Le Thang Long each received 5 years,

<sup>29</sup> John Ruwitch, "Vietnam Bloggers Arrested Over China Shirt Protest," Reuters, September 5, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5840CY20090905>.

<sup>30</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Internet Enemies: Vietnam," <http://en.rsf.org/internet-enemie-viet-nam,36694.html>, accessed August 25, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> "Vietnam's Internet Crackdown," CNN Video, June 18, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2010/06/18/stevens.vietnam.internet.crackdown.cnn?iref=allsearch>.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Banned, Censored, Harassed and Jailed," news release, October 11, 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/10/11/banned-censored-harassed-and-jailed>.

<sup>33</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Internet Enemies: Vietnam."

Nguyen Tien Trung received 7 years, and Tran Huynh Duy Thuc received 16 years.<sup>34</sup> In late 2009, three other individuals were sentenced to prison for views expressed on the internet: Pham Van Troi, a poet sentenced to four years; Vu Van Hung, a former teacher sentenced to three years; and Tran Duc Thach, a poet sentenced to three years.<sup>35</sup> As of July 2010, Global Voices Online had compiled a list of 10 jailed online activists in Vietnam.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to imprisonment, bloggers and online activists have been subjected to physical attacks, job loss, termination of personal internet services, and travel restrictions. In May 2010, Lu Thi Thu Trang, an online activist associated with the pro-democracy movement Bloc 8406, was beaten by police in front of her five-year-old son, and then detained for interrogation.<sup>37</sup> In June 2009, popular blogger Huy Duc was fired from his job with a state-owned newspaper after it came under government pressure over postings he had written condemning the Berlin Wall.<sup>38</sup> In May 2010, provincial authorities terminated the telephone and internet-service connection at the home of Ha Si Phu, one of Vietnam's best-known dissident bloggers, alleging that he had used his telephone line to transmit "antigovernment" information. Also in May 2010, police detained and interrogated two bloggers, Uyen Vu and Trang Dem, at Tan Son Nhat airport in Ho Chi Minh City, and barred them from traveling abroad for their honeymoon.<sup>39</sup> In Oct 2010, blogger Le Nguyen Huong Tra (who uses the penname Do Long Girl) was detained on charges of "misusing democratic rights to violate the state's and citizens' interests," after she reported about the family affairs of a high-ranking official.<sup>40</sup> That same month, blogger Phan Thanh Hai (who uses the penname Anh Ba Sai Gon) was arrested on charges of distributing false information on his blog.<sup>41</sup> The incidents occurred as part of a broader crackdown on free expression in the lead up to an important Communist Party Congress in January 2011.

The Vietnamese authorities employ both technology-based and "low-tech" methods for monitoring online communications. The former include monitoring web traffic and e-mails, especially of political activists, while the latter involve shadowing the movements of known online activists. Cybercafe owners are required to install special software to track

<sup>34</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Court Sentences Four Netizens and Pro-Democracy Activists to a Total of 33 Years in Jail," news release, January 20, 2010, <http://en.rsf.org/vietnam-court-sentences-four-netizens-and-20-01-2010.36156.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Banned, Censored, Harassed, and Jailed," August 4, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/08/04/banned-censored-harassed-and-jailed>.

<sup>36</sup> Threatened Voices, "Bloggers: Vietnam," Global Voices Advocacy, <http://threatened.globalvoicesonline.org/bloggers/vietnam>, accessed August 26, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> "Government Suppression of Bloggers and Websites," VietCatholic News, May 27, 2010, <http://www.vietcatholic.org/News/Clients/ReadArticle.aspx?ID=80607> (in Vietnamese).

<sup>38</sup> Viet Tan, "Denial of Service: Cyberattacks by the Vietnamese Government."

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Vietnam: Stop Cyber Attacks Against Online Critics," news release, May 26, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/05/26/vietnam-stop-cyber-attacks-against-online-critics>.

<sup>40</sup> Vu Mai and Quoc Thang, "Blogger Co Gai Do Long Urgently Arrested," VN Express, October 26, 2010, <http://vnexpress.net/GL/Phap-luat/2010/10/3BA221C2/> (in Vietnamese).

<sup>41</sup> "Another blogger arrested in Vietnam crackdown", Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), October 28, 2010, <http://cpj.org/2010/10/another-blogger-arrested-in-vietnam-crackdown.php>.

and store information about their clients' online activities.<sup>42</sup> In addition, citizens are obliged to provide the details of their government-issued identification documents to register with their ISP when purchasing a home internet connection. In late 2009, the MIC announced that all prepaid mobile-phone subscribers would be required to register their details with the operator. Individuals are allowed to register only up to three numbers per carrier.<sup>43</sup> The government argues that such measures are necessary to counter mass text-message advertising that plagues many Vietnamese phone users. However, the steps also facilitate surveillance, as service providers are required to share information about users with the government upon request. Nevertheless, there are no requirements for real-name registration when blogging or posting online comments, and many Vietnamese do so anonymously.

The intensified harassment of bloggers in 2009 and 2010 has coincided with systematic cyberattacks targeting individual blogs as well as websites run by other activists in Vietnam and abroad.<sup>44</sup> Since September 2009, dozens of sites have been attacked, including those operated by Catholics who criticize government confiscation of Church property, forums featuring political discussions, and the website raising environmental concerns surrounding bauxite mining.<sup>45</sup> The attackers infected computers with malicious software disguised as a popular keyboard program that allows Microsoft Windows to support the Vietnamese language. Once infected, computers became part of a "botnet" whose command-and-control servers were primarily accessed from internet protocol (IP) addresses inside Vietnam. The network of hijacked computers was then used to carry out the denial-of-service attacks described above. Both McAfee, a major internet security firm, and Google reported on the sophisticated attacks, with the latter estimating that "potentially tens of thousands of computers" had been affected, most of which belonged to Vietnamese speakers.<sup>46</sup> McAfee stated that "the perpetrators may have political motivations, and may have some allegiance to the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam."<sup>47</sup> The Vietnamese authorities have not taken measures to find or punish the attackers. On the contrary, during a national conference on media held in May 2010, the MPS announced that it had "destroyed 300 'bad' websites and blogs."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> "Internet Censorship Tightening in Vietnam," AsiaNews.it, June 22, 2010, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Internet-censorship-tightening-in-Vietnam-18746.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Phong Quan, "Sim Card Registration Now Required in Vietnam," *Vietnam Talking Points*, January 16, 2010, <http://talk.onevietnam.org/sim-card-registration-now-required-in-vietnam/>.

<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Vietnam: Stop Cyber Attacks Against Online Critics."

<sup>45</sup> "Authorities Crush Online Dissent; Activists Detained Incommunicado," *Free News Free Speech* (blog), June 2, 2010, <http://freenewsfreespeech.blogspot.com/2010/06/authorities-crush-online-dissent.html>.

<sup>46</sup> George Kurtz, "Vietnamese Speakers Targeted in Cyberattack," *CTO* (blog), March 30, 2010, <http://siblog.mcafee.com/cto/vietnamese-speakers-targeted-in-cyberattack/>; Neel Mehta, "The Chilling Effect of Malware," *Google Online Security Blog*, March 30, 2010, <http://googleonlinesecurity.blogspot.com/2010/03/chilling-effects-of-malware.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Kurtz, "Vietnamese Speakers Targeted in Cyberattack."

<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Vietnam: Stop Cyber Attacks Against Online Critics."