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Viet Nam: Failing to uphold human rights as land rights activist is sentenced to 20 months in prison

In yet another example of criminalising peaceful protest, Cấn Thị Thêu, a well-known land rights activist, was tried and convicted by a court in Hà Nội on 20 September and sentenced to 20 months' imprisonment on charges of "disturbing public order" under Article 245 of the 1999 Penal Code. Amnesty International condemns Viet Nam's continuing failure to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, contrary to its obligations as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Dozens of people who went to Đống Đa district People's Court to support Cấn Thị Thêu were also arrested outside, including her son Trịnh Bá Phương, and taken to a police station in Hà Đông district; others who went to the police station to call for their release were also arrested. They were all released several hours later, with reports that some had been beaten.

Cấn Thị Thêu was arrested at home on 10 June 2016 on accusations of posting photos on her Facebook page inciting protests against reclamation of land in Dương Nội, Hà Đông district of Hà Nội, and also "inciting" a boycott of the May 2016 elections for the National Assembly. She is a veteran campaigner for the rights of farmers whose land has been confiscated by the authorities with unfair compensation. Her own family farm was confiscated in 2007. Following her arrest, Cấn Thị Thêu went on hunger strike for 13 days in protest.

This is now the second time in two years that Cấn Thị Thêu faces imprisonment. She was previously arrested in April 2014 and imprisoned for 15 months for "activities against public officials" under Article 257 of the 1999 Penal Code, for allegedly leading protests in Dương Nội.

Amnesty International calls on Viet Nam to quash the ruling and to cease their continuing intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders and activists. The authorities should immediately end the misuse of the legal and criminal justice system to prevent the effective enjoyment of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the country.

Background

Amnesty International has documented at least 82 prisoners of conscience in Viet Nam, either convicted after unfair trials and serving long sentences, or held in pre-trial detention solely for exercising their human rights. They include bloggers, labour and land rights activists, political activists, ethnic and religious minorities, and advocates for human rights and social justice.

Prisoners of conscience in Viet Nam are at risk of enforced disappearances; prolonged periods of incommunicado detention and solitary confinement; the infliction of severe physical pain and suffering; the withholding of medical treatment; and punitive prison transfers, as documented in Amnesty International report, Prisons Within Prisons: Torture and Ill-treatment of Prisoners of Conscience in Viet Nam, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa41/4187/2016/en/>.