

URGENT ACTION

INDEPENDENT BOOK SELLERS TORTURED BY POLICE

Two members of the Liberal Publishing House - a local independent publisher that sells books considered sensitive by the government – have been detained and tortured by police in Ho Chi Minh City. Since early October 2019, police have harassed, and intimidated dozens of people connected to the Liberal Publishing House in what appears to be a targeted campaign. The individuals who have been targeted are believed to have either bought or read books printed by the publisher, or to have worked for the publishing house.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc
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Dear Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc,

I am writing to express my grave concern about the crackdown against members and patrons of the **Liberal Publishing House (Nhà Xuất Bản Tự Do)**, a local independent publisher that has produced books on public policy and political thought in Viet Nam. I find it particularly distressing to learn about two of its members who have been arbitrarily detained and tortured, and many others who have had to flee for their safety over the last year.

Most recently, on 8 May 2020, police in Ho Chi Minh City arrested and detained **Thủy Tuất**, a member of Liberal Publishing House when he was delivering books to a reader. While in custody, Thủy Tuất was interrogated and brutally tortured, including punching in the face, chest, ribs and stomach by police from 9am to 3am the following day. Upon release, despite having serious injuries, Thủy Tuất went directly into hiding fearing that police might re-arrest him. Subsequently, police arrested his 24-year-old daughter and refused to release her unless Thủy Tuất returns to the police station. She remains detained in police custody.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Police in Ho Chi Minh City have been accused of arbitrarily detaining and torturing a staff member of Liberal Publishing House before. In October 2019, another member was forced to go into hiding after being harassed by the police. Across the country, hundreds of people have reported their experience of being interrogated for buying books from Liberal Publishing House since October 2019, many have had their houses searched and books confiscated by the police.

Both Viet Nam's Constitution and international human rights law guarantee the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to receive and impart information and ideas. This includes accessing and reading information contained in books such as those printed by the Liberal Publishing House. Freely accessing such information and ideas is also an important aspect of the right to education.

I therefore urge you Prime Minister to:

- Release **Thủy Tuất's** daughter immediately and stop the harassment and intimidation against **Thủy Tuất** and his family;
- Stop the crackdown campaign against Liberal Publishing House and its supporters immediately, and order an independent and thorough investigation into the alleged torture and arbitrary detention cases;
- Ensure that Liberal Publishing House and other independent publishers can enjoy their rights to freedom of expression, information and publishing.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Liberal Publishing House, which was officially introduced to the public on 14 February 2019, publishes a range of non-fiction books written by Vietnamese authors on topics such as political science, public policy and other social issues. Some titles include Politics of a Police State, Non-Violent Resistance, Politics for the Common People, Life Behind Iron Bars, and A Handbook for Families of Prisoners. Many of these books are considered sensitive by the government and their publication is banned. The Vietnamese authorities generally censor publications that are perceived to conflict with government policy.

Since the Liberal Publishing House began operations, the police have launched several sting operations to try to arrest people working for it. It has also been subjected to online harassment, its Facebook page was subjected to a coordinated reporting campaign conducted by cyber-troop, where a military unit operates online and targets activists, human rights defenders and political dissidents. This led to the closure of the Facebook account in February 2019, the same month the Publishing House came online. In July, three different banks informed the publishing house that its bank accounts would be closed. No justification was given. Police forced shipping companies to provide names and addresses of buyers. Those who refused to comply faced frequent intimidation, harassment and intrusive surveillance. In November 2019, the publishing house's newly launched website (<https://nhaxuatbantudo.com/>) was targeted by multiple cyberattacks, attempting to take over the control of the website, only with the support of IT expert that the website could maintain its operation

Since early October 2019, police have harassed, and intimidated dozens of people connected to the Liberal Publishing House -- in what appears to be a targeted campaign. The harassment has taken place in at least three major cities, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, in addition to the provinces of Binh Duong, Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Phu Yen. The individuals who have been targeted are believed to have either bought or read books printed by the publisher, or to have worked for the publishing house.

According to information received by Amnesty International, individuals in those locations have been summoned to local police stations where they have been interrogated about books they bought from the publishing house. After questioning, most were pressured to sign statements promising that they would not buy books from the Liberal Publishing House again. In one case, police detained and allegedly tortured a man in custody on 15 October 2019 in Ho Chi Minh City, to force him to confess to working for the publisher. Police detained him for more than 12 hours, during which time he was repeatedly beaten until his nose bled. Fearful of re-arrest, the man went into hiding as soon as he was released.

On 23-24 October, a man in Phu Yen province received two letters from the police summoning him to the local station for questioning about his receipt of "banned" books. After interrogating the man, police searched his house and confiscated books printed by the Liberal Publishing House. While in early November, a man who occasionally works with the Liberal Publishing House went into hiding, fearing arrest, after police instructed his regular employer to inform them when he next came to the office.

Most recently, on 8 May 2020, police in Ho Chi Minh City arrested and detained Thủy Tuất, a member of Liberal Publishing Hour for delivering books to a reader. He was detained from 9am that day to 3am the next morning. While in custody, police interrogated him about his affiliation with the publishing house and, according to the victim, tortured him. Particularly, police beat Thủy Tuất every time he failed to answer a question, or his answer did not satisfy them. He was reported to be punched in the face, ribs, chest and stomach, kicked his shins and had his toes stepped on by at least six police officials. Working in pairs, the officials switched several times during the interrogation process. Upon release, he went immediately into hiding despite having serious injuries.

In 2019 at least 19 individuals were arrested solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression in Viet Nam, some of whom were tried and sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Another four individuals have been arrested for the same reason so far in 2020.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English/Vietnamese]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 26 June 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Thủy Tuất (he/him) / Members and patrons of the Liberal Publishing House (they/them)

And copies to:

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