

# URGENT ACTION

## GRAVE CONCERN FOR IMPRISONED ACTIVIST'S HEALTH

Prominent human rights defender and prisoner of conscience, **Cần Thị Thêu**, who has been imprisoned for five years and allegedly subjected to torture and inhumane conditions of detention, recently informed her family about some serious health issues. Arrested in 2020, Thêu and her two sons were sentenced between 8 to 10 years in prison under Article 117 of the Criminal Code for "opposing the State of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam". Thêu and her family began advocating against forced evictions and became leading figures in the land rights movement. There are grave concerns that, without access to adequate healthcare, her life could be at risk. Thêu is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising her human rights, and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

**State President Lương Cường**  
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Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my grave concern for the health of 63-year-old **Cần Thị Thêu**, a prominent land rights activist and human rights defender who should be celebrated and supported by the Vietnamese authorities, rather than harassed and detained. She is a prisoner of conscience, who has been detained solely for exercising her human rights.

Arrested in 2020, it was deeply disturbing to learn of reports that, during pre-trial detention, Thêu, and her two sons **Trịnh Bá Phương** and **Trịnh Bá Tư**, were subjected to harsh treatment and torture. Allegedly, Trịnh Bá Phương had his genitals beaten by the police; Trịnh Bá Tư was also beaten, leading to kidney swelling; and Thêu suffered from an eye infection due to being placed in a cell with no proper ventilation or sufficient water, during extreme heat. Further adding to my concern, was hearing reports that they continue to face ill-treatment while incarcerated due to their vocal opposition to prison conditions.

Most recently, in early August 2025, Thêu informed her family that she was unable to eat anything other than some salted rice with a little broth, as her body struggles to accept anything else. She also complained of a dull pain in her right groin region and, despite the hot summer weather, that her body temperature was unusually low. Thêu received a three-day antibiotic course on 28 July, but her condition was so worrying, the treatment was extended for a further 10 days. Concerningly, the authorities have refused her access to her own medical records at any point during her treatment. Without proper care and regular visits from her family, there are grave concerns for her wellbeing.

Over the ten years that they had been activists, Thêu and her family have faced intense harassment and surveillance from local authorities. In 2020, Cần Thị Thêu, Trịnh Bá Phương and Trịnh Bá Tư were sentenced to 8 to 10 years in prison solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Thêu's selflessness, sincerity and tireless work on behalf of those in need have made her one of the most widely respected human rights defenders in Viet Nam.

**State President, I urge you to ensure that:**

- **Cần Thị Thêu is immediately and unconditionally released, as she is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for exercising her human right to freedom of expression;**
- **Pending her release, Cần Thị Thêu is treated in full accordance with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and is protected from torture and other ill-treatment and provided access to adequate healthcare; and**
- **Trịnh Bá Phương and Trịnh Bá Tư are released and their convictions and sentences relating to the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression are quashed.**

Your sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Cần Thị Thêu is a well-known land rights activist and human rights defender in Viet Nam. She became an activist after her family's land was confiscated by the authorities in 2010. She began advocating against forced evictions and became a leading figure in the land rights movement. Thêu and her family supported victims of land grabbing, human rights violations, and prisoners of conscience. By documenting and reporting the issues on their social media accounts, which had more than 50,000 followers, the issues that Thêu and her family raised were able to reach a large audience. They furthered their advocacy by providing human rights reports, especially on land rights and freedom of expression, to international communities.

Over the ten years that they had been activists, Thêu and her family faced intense harassment and surveillance from local authorities. Cần Thị Thêu has been jailed twice; in 2014 (for 15 months) after leading a demonstration against a land grab, and again in 2016 (for 20 months) for filming a forced eviction. In total, she was in prison for two years and nine months. Her husband faced the same charges in 2014, and also spent 18 months in jail. After their parents' imprisonment in 2014, her sons Trịnh Bá Phương and Trịnh Bá Tư also became activists and human rights defenders. Upon her release from prison, Cần Thị Thêu continued her activism with her sons and her husband.

Tensions reached a peak when Thêu and her two sons publicly advocated for the residents of Đồng Tâm village, who were victims of a high-profile land dispute with the government, from 2017 to 2020. In January 2020, police raided the village of Đồng Tâm, resulting in the death of a 84-year-old village leader and three police officers and the arrest of dozens of villagers. Despite the sensitivities and high-risks associated, and with all state-owned media censored, Cần Thị Thêu, Trịnh Bá Phương and Trịnh Bá Tư used social media to inform the public about the incident and human rights violations.

As a result, on 24 June 2020, police [arrested](#) Cần Thị Thêu, Trịnh Bá Phương and Trịnh Bá Tư. At the time of the arrest, Phương had recently given birth to a son, who was just 4 days old when he was taken away.

On 5 May 2021, Cần Thị Thêu and Trịnh Bá Tư were sentenced to eight years in prison with three years' probation. Seven months later, on 15 December 2021, Trịnh Bá Phương was sentenced to ten years in jail with five years' probation. The three were charged for "making, storing, or spreading information, materials or items for the purpose of opposing the State of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam" under Article 117 of the Criminal Code. It is reported that, since 2011, at least 300 activists, human rights defenders and journalists in Viet Nam have been arrested under the Criminal Code.

During the pre-trial detention, there were several reports of the three activists' harsh treatment and torture. Allegedly, Trịnh Bá Phương had his genitals beaten by the police; Trịnh Bá Tư was also beaten, leading to kidney swelling. He also led a 20-day hunger strike to protest the harsh treatment. Thêu, to this day, continues to suffer from an eye infection that was caused by poor pre-detention conditions, being placed in a cell with no proper ventilation or sufficient water, and in extreme heat.

Once in prison, the harassment and beatings reportedly continued. Transferred to three different jails, far away from their hometown (around 1000 km), it is incredibly difficult and costly for their family to visit them. In fact, it was only in March 2022 that they were even allowed a visit from their family. In September 2022, [Trịnh Bá Tư was beaten](#) and placed in solitary confinement for ten days with his feet shackled because. He had simply been advocating for another prisoner to access emergency healthcare.

In 2021, Amnesty International [condemned](#) the arbitrary arrest and unfair trials of Thêu and her two sons and also raised grave [concerns](#) over their ill-treatment in 2022. Similarly, in June 2022, [UN experts raised serious concerns](#) about the apparent systematic violations of the rights of human rights defenders in Viet Nam - including Cần Thị Thêu, Trịnh Bá Tư and Trịnh Bá Phương - through arbitrary arrest, detention, unfair trials and criminal convictions in relation to the mere exercise of their right to freedom of expression and opinion.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** English, Vietnamese

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 10 December 2025

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

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Can Thi Theu (she/her), Trinh Ba Phuong (he/him) and Trinh Ba Tu (he/him)

## ADDITIONAL TARGETS

His Excellency Mr Minh Hung

*Ambassador*

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Salutation: Your Excellency