

High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini  
European External Action Service  
EEAS Building, 9A Rond Point Schuman  
1046 Brussels

CC: Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malström, First Vice-President Frans Timmermans

Brussels, April 15 2019

**RE: civil society organisations call for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Nguyễn Bắc Truyển**

Dear High Representative/Vice President Mogherini,

We are writing to express our deep concern about the arrest and sentencing of legal expert and human rights defender Nguyễn Bắc Truyển in Vietnam, and to request that you take all necessary measures to secure his immediate and unconditional release.

Nguyễn Bắc Truyển was abducted by the Vietnamese police on 30 July 2017 in Ho Chi Minh City and held in incommunicado arbitrary detention in Hanoi until his trial. He was not allowed to receive a visit from his wife until six months after incommunicado detention and with his defense counsel until two weeks before his trial. Along with five other human rights activists, Truyển was convicted of ‘carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the government’; he was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment followed by three years’ house arrest on 5 April 2018.

After the trial, statements of concern were issued by organisations in Vietnam and worldwide, as well as the [European Union External Action Service](#), the [German Federal Commissioner on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid](#), the UK’s [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#), and a [US State Department Spokesperson](#). However, at an appeal trial on 4 June 2018 Truyển’s sentence was upheld.

**Nguyễn Bắc Truyển is a legal expert who has been targeted for his peaceful defence of human rights; the charges against him are completely without foundation.**

Truyển has a long history of defending and promoting human rights including the right to freedom of religion or belief for religious minorities in Vietnam. In 2004, Truyển was the first entrepreneur in Vietnam to voluntarily introduce social compliance and gender equality standards in his two companies. In 2006 he was arrested and later sentenced to three and a half years in prison followed by two years’ house arrest after criticising the ruling Communist Party. After his release in 2010, he joined the Vietnamese Political and Religious Prisoners Friendship Association, an organization which assists prisoners and their families. From 2014 until his arrest he was the coordinator of the assistance program for war invalids of the Catholic Redemptionist Bureau for Justice and Peace in Ho Chi Minh City. During this time, Truyển often assisted vulnerable social groups, including religious minorities. In 2011 he was awarded the Hellman Hammett Award by Human Rights Watch.

As a result of his work, the authorities have subjected Nguyễn Bắc Truyển and his wife Bùi Thị Kim Phượng to years of harassment, forced eviction and violent assault. On 24 February 2014, Truyển and Phượng were attacked and severely injured by unknown assailants believed to be working for state security agents while on their way to the Australian Embassy in Hanoi. Police also prevented the then-UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, from visiting Truyen’s home on 28 July 2014.

Furthermore, in March 2019 Bùi Thị Kim Phượng was prevented from leaving Vietnam to travel to Europe in order to meet with the European External Action Service, members of the European Parliament and parliamentarians from EU member states, to advocate for her husband's release.

As the EU and Vietnam move towards the conclusion of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement, it is imperative that human rights concerns are at the forefront of negotiations. We share the concerns expressed in the November 2018 European Parliament's [urgency resolution](#) on Vietnam, and echo the call made by 32 MEPs in their [letter](#) to you and Commissioner Malmström on 17 September 2018, urging the EU to articulate a series of human rights benchmarks in Vietnam, including the release of Nguyễn Bắc Truyển and all people imprisoned for exercising their basic rights.

In line with the EU Guidelines on human rights defenders, we strongly urge you to lead EU efforts, taking all necessary measures to urge Vietnam to immediately and unconditionally release Nguyễn Bắc Truyển, and ensuring his safety and that of his family. We further urge you to call on Vietnam to end all violations and reprisals against human rights defenders, and to demonstrate its commitment to improving its human rights record.

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

**Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT-France)**

**Amnesty International**

**Association for the Advancement of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Vietnam (AAFoRB)**

**Boat People SOS (BPSOS)**

**Buddhist Solidarity Association**

**Campaign to Abolish Torture in Vietnam**

**Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)**

**CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation**

**Defend the Defenders (Vietnam)**

**Federation des ligues des droits de l'Homme (FIDH) under the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**

**Front Line Defenders**

**Human Rights Watch**

**Quê Me: Vietnam Committee on Human Rights**

**Stefanus Alliance International**

**Stichting Vietnam Human Rights Foundation**

**Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR)**

**World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)**

**World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), under the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**