

15 May 2017

## **Vietnam: Environmental rights defenders targeted for their coverage of Formosa waste spill protests**

On 15 May 2017, environmental rights defender, **Hoang Duc Binh**, was arrested by the police and charged with “resisting persons in the performance of their official duties” and “abusing democratic freedoms” by the authorities of the province of Nghe An, in north-central Vietnam. The environmental rights defender, **Bach Hong Quyen**, is also facing charges of “causing public disorder” for his organisation of an environmental protest. He is currently hiding from a nationwide manhunt launched by the authorities in Ha Tinh province on 12 May 2017.

[Hoang Duc Binh](#) is an environmental rights defender and a member of Viet Labour, an organisation of labour groups inside and outside Vietnam aiming to protect the rights of workers. [Bach Hong Quyen](#) is an environmental rights defender and a member of the Vietnam Path Movement, a human rights group led by prisoner of conscience, Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, and human rights lawyer, [Le Cong Dinh](#). Bach Hong Quyen has been under surveillance since he organised, on 3 April 2017, a march to mark the one-year anniversary of the Formosa waste spill. Hoang Duc Binh and Bach Hong Quyen are active bloggers and covered the environmental disaster caused by the Taiwanese steel plant, Formosa, in April 2016, its impact on local populations, as well as protests against the company as a result of the pollution.

On the morning of 15 May 2017, Hoang Duc Binh was driving to Vinh City with a group of environmental activists – including Catholic priest Nguyen Dinh Thuc who is well known in Vietnam for his environmental rights work – when their car was stopped in the centre of the Dien Chau district by police officers in uniform and unidentified persons in civilian clothing. The police violently removed Hoang Duc Binh from the car, took him and drove away. During the arrest, the police had set up cellphone blockers so that witnesses of the scene could not publish any live videos or photos. Later in the day, the authorities of the province of Nghe An publicised an arrest order for Hoang Duc Binh issued by the province’s People’s Procuracy two days previously. According to the arrest order, the human rights defender is facing charges of “resisting persons in the performance of their official duties” under Article 257 and “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, the legitimate rights and interests of organizations and/or citizens” under Article 258 of the Penal Code. If convicted, he faces imprisonment of between six months and three years for the first charge and up to seven years for the second charge. In light of the fact that mistreatment and torture are still widespread practices in Vietnamese jails and detention centres, there are legitimate fears that Hoang Duc Binh could be subjected to ill-treatment while detained by the authorities. The authorities will hold him for investigation for ninety days.

On 12 May 2017, the police in Vietnam’s central province of Ha Tinh officially issued a national arrest warrant against the human rights defender, Bach Hong Quyen, accusing him of “causing public disorder” under Article 245 of the country’s Penal Code. The charge carries a penalty of up to seven years imprisonment. Bach Hong Quyen is currently hiding from the authorities after state media broadcast pictures of him calling for his arrest.

Several human rights defenders have been harassed by the Vietnamese authorities for covering the

April 2016 Formosa toxic waste spill, which resulted in a large number of fish dying, leaving fishermen jobless in four coastal provinces. Human rights defenders are also being persecuted for their involvement in ongoing protests against the Taiwanese steel plant, Formosa . On 2 May 2017, environmental rights defender, Le My Hanh, was [violently attacked](#) in Ho Chi Minh City by a group of five individuals, a month after she was brutally beaten while covering an environmental protest. On 10 October 2016, blogger and human rights defender, Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, was [arrested and charged](#) for allegedly possessing “anti-government material” linked to the Formosa spill.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest and detention of Hoang Duc Binh as well as the arrest warrant issued against Bach Hong Quyen, which it believes are directly related to their peaceful and legitimate work in the defence of human rights in Vietnam.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Vietnam to:**

1. Immediately drop all charges against **Hoang Duc Binh** and **Bach Hong Quyen** as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Hoang Duc Binh and revoke the arrest warrant for Bach Hong Quyen;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Hoang Duc Binh, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the ‘Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment’, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Allow Hoang Duc Binh immediate and unfettered access to his family and lawyer;
5. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Vietnam and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.