



Honourable President of Vietnam
Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong
Presidential Palace
No 2 Hung Vuong Street, Ngoc Ho
Ba Dinh, Hanoi 118708
Vietnam

*December 13, 2018
Brussels, Belgium*

Your Excellency,

As a Member of the European Parliament representing the North West of England, I am writing to express my deep concern over the situation of imprisoned blogger **Tran Huynh Duy Thuc**.

His family reported in late November 2018 that he had experienced symptoms of food poisoning and further deterioration of his health, including high blood pressure. Concerned about food quality, Thuc refused the prison food, relying only on instant noodles provided by his family. In turn, prison authorities restricted his access to hot water to cook noodles and took away his personal blood pressure monitor. In an open letter, published by The 88 Project, Thuc's daughter stated, "the family is extremely worried about his health and safety since we believe these new forms of mistreatment are used to coerce my dad to admit guilty." Although prison authorities have since resumed his access to hot water and his blood pressure monitor, Thuc's treatment and ongoing imprisonment remains a grave concern.

I urge you to immediately release and drop all charges against him.

Tran Huynh Duy Thuc is a blogger and human rights defender. On 24 May 2009, Thuc was arrested and later falsely charged with subversion under Article 79 of the Penal Code, and on 20 January 2010 sentenced to 16 years in prison. He has reportedly been subjected to torture and pressured to deliver false confessions.

It is my understanding that before his arrest Thuc was an engineer and entrepreneur from Ho Chi Minh City, and a respected blogger about social, political, and economic issues under the pen name Tran Dong Chan. He has always been a peaceful advocate for civil and political rights in Vietnam and repeatedly maintained his innocence and refused to confess in exchange for exile.

It is my understanding that in accordance with Vietnam's 2015 revised Penal Code, Article 109(3), Mr. Thuc may be released without the court having to overturn its earlier ruling. Yet, he is still waiting for a response to his numerous requests for a review of his case under provisions in the new law. The failure to respond to his request for a review furthers the appearance of the arbitrary nature of his imprisonment. As indeed, in August 2012 the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that his detention was arbitrary.

A dynamic and independent civil society, where human rights are promoted and protected, is key to sustainable development and must be a minimum standard to establishing a Free Trade Agreement with the EU. However, Vietnam's current human rights record raises grave concerns, such as the ongoing mistreatment and arbitrary imprisonment of Tran Huyhn Thuy Duc whose case I have previously raised by name both in my support of an urgency resolution on 9 June 2016 and more recently in a 17 September 2018 joint-letter signed with 31 other MEPs calling for concrete human rights benchmarks before I can support the EVFTA.

Therefore, I am strongly calling for Mr. Thuc's immediate and unconditional release, and that he shall be allowed to remain inside his home country, Vietnam, and not forced into exile as a precondition for his release.

Sincerely yours,

Julie Ward