

PRESS RELEASE

PROJECT 



**VIETNAM ARRESTS SECOND TRADE UNIONIST IN A MONTH AS
MINISTER OF PUBLIC SECURITY NAMED PRESIDENT**

**New wave of repression intensifies after leaders
order crackdown on human rights & foreign influence**

MAY 20, 2024

The ILO, the EU, and the United States should immediately issue public statements condemning Vietnam for arresting trade unionists, Project88 said today.

Hanoi police arrested [Vu Minh Tien](#), [head](#) of policy and legal affairs at the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) and [director](#) of the Institute for Workers and Trade Unions (IWTU), Project88 has verified. While police have not yet announced his arrest or the charges against him, a source told Project88 that Binh is being detained under Article 337 of the country's [criminal code](#) by the Hanoi Security Investigation Agency (Cơ quan an ninh điều tra - Công an TP Hà Nội). Article 337 criminalizes the 'deliberate disclosure of classified information; appropriation, trading, [and] destruction of classified documents'. Tien was last seen in public on March 21 at a [workshop](#) in Ho Chi Minh City.

Tien's arrest comes on the heels of the arrest of [Nguyen Van Binh](#), a government labor reformer who was also arrested on the same charge. Hanoi police only announced Binh's arrest after Project88 revealed that he had been detained. Project88 has not been able to contact Tien, whose phone has been inactive on a popular messaging platform used in Vietnam since April 20, 2024. Binh's phone has been inactive on the same platform since April 15.

Tien, like Binh, was leading efforts to bring Vietnam's labor law into line with international standards. In his role at the VGCL, Tien was tasked with [amending](#) the Trade Union Law, which is due to be signed into law by the National Assembly later this year. The VGCL is Vietnam's state-controlled confederation of trade unions -the country does not permit independent trade unions.

The IWTU conducts research on labor issues and provides policy advice to the Vietnamese government. The IWTU is also a [member](#) of Vietnam's Domestic Advisory Group (DAG). Under the terms of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), both the EU and Vietnam are supposed to allow independent civil society organizations to form DAGs to monitor their compliance with labor and sustainability commitments.

Implementation of the EVFTA has been anything but smooth. In 2021, two Vietnamese civil society activists who attempted to form an independent monitoring group were [arrested](#) on false charges of tax evasion. Vietnam then proceeded to stack the network with government friendly organizations. In December of 2023, the EU DAG issued a [statement](#) expressing alarm about human rights violations, while urging Vietnam to ratify ILO convention without further delay. More recently, a coalition of Vietnamese civil society groups [submitted](#) a complaint regarding alleged violations of workers' rights to the EU. Then in April of 2024, Vietnam arrested Nguyen Van Binh, who was pushing for the government to ratify ILO Convention 87. Now, with the arrest of Vu Minh Tien, the director of an organization represented in Vietnam's DAG has been arrested. In spite of this atrocious track record, the EU has not taken any concrete measures to sanction Vietnam for violating the terms of the agreement.

In November 2023, the IWTU reported that at a [bilateral meeting](#) between the EU's DAG and Vietnam's DAG, European civil society organizations criticized human rights abuses by the Vietnamese government, including the arrest of activists and the failure to guarantee the right of workers to engage in collective bargaining. It is possible that IWTU officials shared information with the EU DAG and this was used as a pretext to arrest Tien.

Tien's arrest comes less than a month after the arrest of Nguyen Van Binh, another trade unionist who agitated within the government to expand protections for workers. At the time of his arrest, Binh was leading efforts to ratify ILO Convention 87, which, if passed, would guarantee workers the right to form independent trade unions without prior authorization. Under the EVFTA, Vietnam agreed to ratify the convention in 2023, although the government has delayed the process. The EU has not imposed any consequences for this delay.

Directive 24

The arrests of Tien and Binh come amid a new wave of repression sweeping through Vietnam. Last year, Vietnam's leaders issued [Directive 24](#), a classified national security

directive that codified the violation of the human rights of the country's 100 million citizens as the official policy of the state.

Doubts about the authenticity of Directive 24 were recently dispelled after Vietnam's Minister of Industry and Trade penned a [submission](#) to the U.S. Department of Commerce in which he defended key provisions of the directive. In the letter, the minister emphasized the importance of protecting national security in the context of international projects.

As with Nguyen Van Binh, there is a direct link between Directive 24 and Vu Minh Tien's arrest. The formation of independent trade unions was identified as a national security problem under Directive 24. The directive also [called](#) for the Vietnamese government to prevent reformist tendencies among officials 'that weaken our regime from within and threaten the interests of the nation, people, and the survival of the regime'. The arrests of Tien and Binh, the first arrests of high-profile reformers in recent years, suggest that Directive 24's orders are being implemented by the state.

Directive 24 is an all-out assault on the liberal values that Western states claim to cherish. Western diplomats acknowledge in private that Directive 24 is troubling—one even describing it to Project88 as 'fascist'. In public, however, they have embraced the false narrative that portrays the directive as 'business as usual' and not signaling a new wave of repression.

To date, however, not a single government has uttered a word of criticism in response to the policy. President Biden and the State Department, which in the past have criticized Vietnam for arresting individual human rights activists, have chosen to remain silent. As Project88 argued in our [report](#) on the arrest of Nguyen Van Binh, perceived geopolitical interests have led America and its allies to turn a blind eye to intensifying repression in Vietnam.

'Western governments that claim to care about human rights need to break their silence about Vietnam's policy of violating those very same rights', said Ben Swanton, Co-director of Project88.

The ILO has expressed an overly optimistic view on Vietnam's willingness to comply with international standards. On February 27, 2024, Ingrid Christensen, the head in Vietnam of the ILO office in Vietnam, stated, 'We are confident Vietnam is committed to ratifying Convention 87 as early as possible'. This is clearly not the case. Despite being acutely aware of this, Christensen has refused to issue a public statement about the arrests.

'These arrests are yet another example of the failure of international organizations to say a mumbling word about the advocates and reformers they are so keen to champion until these people wind up in jail', said Ben Swanton, Co-director of Project88.