

Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton**
U.S. Department of State
Washington DC
USA

Paris, October 25, 2010

Subject: Your visit to Hanoi for ASEAN summit

Dear Secretary of State Clinton,

Reporters Without Borders would like to ask you to use your October 30 visit to Hanoi to press the Vietnamese authorities to release imprisoned journalists and cyber-dissidents, referring in particular to the cases of **Pham Minh Hoang, Nguyen Tien Trung and Le Cong Dinh**. A meeting with their families or with human rights activists would be in line with the support for free expression you declared in your speech of January 21.

Le Cong Dinh, a cyber-dissident and well-known lawyer, was sentenced to five years in prison on January 20. Nguyen Tien Trung, a blogger and pro-democracy activist, is serving a seven-year jail sentence. Their jail terms are to be followed by three years of house arrest. Both were convicted of endangering national security and “organizing campaigns in collusion with foreign-based reactionary groups aimed at overthrowing the people’s government with the Internet’s help.”

Pham Minh Hoang, who kept a blog (www.pkquoc.multiply.com), was formally charged on September 29 after six weeks in detention, during which his family was without any news of him. He is accused of activities aimed at overthrowing the government and of being a member of the opposition Viet Tan party, which the authorities regard as a “terrorist organization.” His wife denies the charges and says the real reason for his arrest was his opposition to bauxite mining by a Chinese company in Vietnam’s central highlands and its impact on the environment. Other journalists and bloggers who have tried to cover this subject, such a **Bui Thanh Hieu, have also been arrested.**

The human rights situation is getting worse in the run-up to the Communist Party congress scheduled for early next year. Vietnam nonetheless agreed to reconcile economic development with respect for its citizens’ fundamental rights when it was admitted to the World Trade Organization in 2006. Vietnam is also a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which enshrines freedom of expression and opinion as a fundamental right that everyone should be able to exercise freely.

The government has been reinforcing its control over the media and Internet since last year. Censorship of online political content and repression of bloggers and netizens who refer to sensitive issues have been stepped up. There has also been an increase in cyber-attacks on websites critical of the government. Article 1 of “Circular No. 7,” issued in January 2009, told

bloggers they could only write about strictly personal matters, effectively banning them from circulating press articles. The Public Security Ministry is involved in Internet surveillance. Vietnam is on the Reporters Without Borders list of “Enemies of the Internet.”

In your historic speech last January, you very clearly affirmed U.S. support for online freedom of speech and opinion, saying the United States had a duty to defend this economic and social development tool. We ask you to now defend these principles in your relations with Vietnam, the world’s second-largest prison for netizens with a total of 16 cyber-dissidents and three journalists detained. The government announced a prisoner amnesty for Vietnam’s national holiday on 2 September, but until now no free speech activist has been released.

Our organization hopes it can count on your support for online free speech and for those who struggle every day to defend the right to news and information.

We thank you in advance for the attention you give to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Julliard', with several horizontal lines drawn underneath it.

Jean-François Julliard
Secretary-General