

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/vietnam-defending-freedom-of-information-07-02-2014,45841.html>

Asia - Vietnam

International advocacy

Defending freedom of information in Vietnam at the UN

7 February 2014

Reporters Without Borders participated in a series of meetings and conferences on Vietnam on 3 and 4 February ahead of Vietnam's **Universal Periodic Review** (an examination of its human rights performance) by the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

"Together with other groups, we evaluated the human rights situation in Vietnam, including freedom of expression and information, and shared our recommendations, which are, above all, the immediate and unconditional release of all detained bloggers, netizens and journalists and an end to censorship and online surveillance," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

"In the light of the latest information available to us, we call on the Human Rights Council's member states to respond to the constant violations of freedom of information and persecution of independent news providers, and to remind the Vietnamese government of the added obligations that accompany its election as a member of the Council."

Ismail added: "Urgent action is needed for the human rights lawyer and blogger **Le Quoc Quan**, who began his sixth day on hunger strike today."

Accompanied by members of RWB's [Swiss section](#) and RWB's permanent representative to the United Nations, Ismail also spoke at a conference held by the Viet Tan network on 4 February that was entitled "With Membership Comes Responsibility: Ensuring Human Rights in Vietnam."

Many Vietnam experts took part on the conference, which was organized with the support of COSUNAM, Lawyers for Lawyers and UN Watch.

PEN International, Article 19, Media Legal Defence Initiative, *Radio Free Asia* and Human Rights for Vietnam PAC were among the organizations that participated in the joint evaluation of the Vietnamese government's human rights policies since its last Universal Periodic Review in 2009.

Citizen-journalist **Tran Quang Thanh** and human rights lawyer **Ha Huy Son** testified about the harassment and censorship of journalists, bloggers and civil society in its entirety. **Pham Chi Dung**, an influential blogger who was to have attended but was prevented from boarding his flight to Geneva at Ho Chi Minh City airport, nonetheless addressed the conference by means of a pre-recorded video.



Reporters Without Borders also participated in a news conference that was organized by the International Federation for Human Rights and the Vietnam Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, and was chaired by Dr. **Vo Van Hai**.

On 5 February, Reporters Without Borders attended the [Universal Periodic Review](#) in order to hear the Vietnamese government respond to the concerns expressed by many states about bloggers who are detained or who are being threatened, and about the situation of freedom of expression and association.

Vietnam's violations of freedom of information are of great concern to Reporters Without Borders, which for years has been drawing this issue to the public's attention and has been monitoring developments in Vietnam, now the world's second biggest prison for bloggers and netizens, after China.

Reporters Without Borders has stepped up its campaigning on Vietnam in recent months:

- ▶ > In response to the persecution of bloggers and netizens, RWB launched a [petition](#) last July for the release of 34 Vietnamese bloggers, which has so far been signed by 35,000 people. RWB [tried unsuccessfully](#) to hand the petition to Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung when he visited France in September.
- ▶ > In September, RWB released a report on Vietnam entitled "[Programmed death of freedom of information](#)." It describes the absolute control that the party has exercised over the traditional media for decades, and calls for an urgent response from the international community to the escalating persecution of cyber-dissidents. It includes recommendations for the Vietnamese authorities, the Vietnamese media and international organizations.
- ▶ > Finally, in December, RWB launched a fund-raising drive to enable Vietnamese bloggers

and netizens to continue their fight for the right to provide freely reported and independent news and information. The funds raised will be used to buy ICT equipment and software. See [GlobalGiving](#).

Vietnam was elected [as a member of the UN Human Rights Council](#) last November despite being a constant violator of freedom of information and despite being ranked 172nd out of 179 countries in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

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