



Viet Nam

Head of state **Truong Tan Sang (replaced Nguyen Minh Triet in July)**

Head of government **Nguyen Tan Dung**

Death penalty **retentionist**

Population **88.8 million**

Life expectancy **75.2 years**

Under-5 mortality **23.6 per 1,000**

Adult literacy **92.8 per cent**

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Harsh repression of dissidents continued, with severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Critics of government policies were targeted, including social and political activists. At least nine dissident trials took place, with 20 defendants. Vaguely worded provisions of the 1999 Penal Code were used to, in effect, criminalize peaceful political and social dissent. The government continued to censor the internet, although use of social networking sites reportedly increased as people used circumvention tools to bypass restrictions. Dozens of prisoners of conscience remained in prison. Religious and ethnic groups perceived to be opposing the government continued to face human rights violations. According to media reports, 23 people were sentenced to death and five executed; the true numbers are believed to be higher. Official statistics on the death penalty remained classified.

Background

A new government was formed in July, with the Prime Minister elected for a second five-year term.

Between June and August, the authorities allowed a series of anti-China protests in the capital, Ha Noi, as tensions increased over disputed ownership of the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health visited in December. He called for the immediate closure of rehabilitation centres for drug users and sex workers, citing concerns over compulsory admittance and treatment administered without consent.

In December, donor countries attending a consultative group meeting in Ha Noi called on the government to improve its human rights record, warning that the ongoing crackdown on dissidents was threatening Viet Nam's international credibility.

Repression of dissent

Severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association continued, with dissidents critical of government policies harshly repressed. Individuals most at risk included pro-democracy activists, and those calling for reform or protesting about environmental issues, land and labour rights, and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. The authorities used vaguely worded provisions of the national security section of the 1999 Penal Code, in particular Article 79 (aiming to "overthrow" the state) and Article 88 ("conducting propaganda" against the state), to punish peaceful dissent.

At least nine dissident trials of 20 defendants took place. More than 18 individuals were arrested and in pre-trial detention at the end of the year, including at least 13 Catholic activists supporting dissident Cu Huy Ha Vu.

- Human rights defender, legal scholar and environmental activist Cu Huy Ha Vu was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in April under Article 88 of the Penal Code. He had twice submitted criminal complaints against the Prime Minister, once in an attempt to stop a controversial bauxite mining project, and the other challenging the legality of a ban on class-action complaints.
- Tran Thi Thuy, Pastor Duong Kim Khai and five other land activists were sentenced to between two and eight years' imprisonment in May by a court in Ben Tre province. They were charged with aiming to "overthrow" the government. Thuy had campaigned for social justice for farmers in the province. Pastor Khai led the "Cattle Shed" Mennonite Church and had helped farmers whose land had been confiscated to petition the authorities.

Prisoners of conscience

Dozens of prisoners of conscience arrested in previous years remained held after receiving long sentences in unfair trials. Many of them were connected with the online pro-democracy movement Bloc 8406.

A small number of prisoners of conscience were released. Dissident writer Tran Khai Thanh Thuy was released in July before the end of her prison term after agreeing to go into exile overseas. Truong Quoc Huy, a mobile phone technician, was released in December, eight months before the end of his six-year prison sentence. Human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai was released in March, after serving his four-year sentence. Both men were placed under house arrest for up to four years.

- Father Nguyen Van Ly, a Catholic priest and co-founder of Bloc 8406, was rearrested by police in July and returned to Ba Sao prison in northern Viet Nam. Father Ly's eight-year prison term was temporarily suspended for 12 months in March 2010 after he had had a stroke in prison and was diagnosed with a brain tumour. The authorities claimed that he was returned to prison for distributing anti-government leaflets while on medical release.
- Blogger and journalist Nguyen Hoang Hai, co-founder of the independent Free Vietnamese Journalists' Club and known as Dieu Cay, remained detained on reported charges of "conducting propaganda" against the state. The authorities denied repeated requests from his family and

lawyer to visit him. Nor did they respond to appeals for information about his welfare after a security official stated that he had “lost his arm”.

Discrimination – ethnic and religious groups

Security officials continued to harass and closely monitor members of religious and ethnic groups perceived to be opponents of the government. Disputes continued over land ownership between local authorities and the Catholic Church, in some cases involving unnecessary or excessive use of force by security officials against peaceful protesters. The Supreme Patriarch of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam remained under de facto house arrest. An unknown number of ethnic Montagnards remained imprisoned following protests in the Central Highlands in 2001 and 2004.

- In November, police beat and arrested at least 30 peaceful Falun Gong demonstrators outside the Chinese embassy in Ha Noi. They had been protesting against the trial of two local Falun Gong broadcasters, Vu Duc Trung and Le Van Thanh. They were sentenced two days later to two and three years' imprisonment respectively for broadcasting illegally into China where the Falun Gong is banned.
- Nguyen Van Lia and Tran Hoai An, members of the Hoa Hao Buddhist church, were sentenced to five and three years' imprisonment respectively in December for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state”. Nguyen Van Lia, aged 72, and Tran Hoai An had briefed foreign diplomats about restrictions on freedom of religion and other human rights violations.