

Brussels, 21 January 2019

**Subject: Demonstration in front of the Palais des Nations - Human Rights Violations in Vietnam**

I would like to thank everyone who has gathered here today to protest against the continuous violations of human rights in Vietnam by the Communist Regime. I regret not being able to join you, but unfortunately, my parliamentary duties require my presence in Brussels. I would still like to express a few thoughts on the current situation.

For years now, Vietnam's human rights record has been highly problematic. At its UPR Review in 2014, 227 recommendations were given to the Vietnamese government which promised to accept and implement 182 of these recommendations. Yet, since 2014, the government has done little to honour its commitments.

The Communist Party, which has been ruling the country since 1976, holds the monopoly on political power and does not allow any challenge to its leadership. The government is highly repressive and restricts basic rights such as freedom of speech, opinion, press, association and religion. When it comes to freedom of assembly, for instance, human rights records have shown that the authorities make regular use of unnecessary or excessive force to disperse and prevent peaceful gatherings and protests. Human rights activists as well as bloggers face harassment, intimidation, physical assault and imprisonment.

Even though Vietnam has signed the UN Convention against Torture, it clearly does not seem to implement it properly, using violence and torture to extract confessions of peaceful activists. In addition, the trial of many of these activists is far from transparent - arrests take place secretly without informing the families, prisoners are transferred to prisons far from their families and they are held in pre-trial detention for up to two years. We also know that detainees have been denied medical treatment and that deaths in custody under suspicious circumstances are no exception. Moreover, the Vietnamese government continues to implement the death penalty - according to data of Amnesty International, between August 2013 and June 2016, an average of 147 executions per year took place.

I want to urge the Vietnamese government to stop violating basic human rights and follow up on the UPR's recommendations - especially the new ones that will be given today! I am also calling for the release of political prisoners such as Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, a human rights activist who often blogged about economic and social conditions in Vietnam, and who has been in prison for the past 9 years. Mr Thuc has been sentenced to a total of 16 years in prison and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has already adopted his case in 2012, concluding that his detention is arbitrary. His case is only one of many, showing us that Vietnam's criminal justice system is far from independent, which is a huge problem that needs to be addressed. That is why I decisively ask the Vietnamese government again to finally follow up on the UPR's recommendations.

Kind regards,

