

21 March 2018

Vietnam: Prisoners' rights defenders detained and beaten by police

On 14 March 2018, human rights defender **Nguyen Thuy Hạnh** was arbitrarily detained and questioned for several hours by Hanoi police. After travelling to the Public Security station where Nguyen Thuy Hạnh was being held, fellow human rights defender **Trương Văn Dũng** was taken into the station, deprived of his possessions, and interrogated. When he refused to allow police to access his phone, police officers beat him severely, later leaving him badly injured on the street outside his home.

[Trương Văn Dũng](#) and [Nguyen Thuy Hanh](#)'s human rights work includes activism on behalf of victims of land appropriation by Vietnamese authorities. Trương Văn Dũng is a founding member of **Hội Bầu Bì Tương Thân**, an organisation that mobilises Vietnamese citizens to support prisoners who have been jailed for their political or religious beliefs. Both defenders regularly organise assistance for families of jailed human rights defenders and join them on prison visits. Trương Văn Dũng has been harassed and physically assaulted on multiple occasions in retaliation for his human rights work. In October 2013, police confiscated the possessions of land appropriation victims gathered outside the Thuy Ke police station in Hanoi. After Trương Văn Dũng visited the police station to request the return of these items, police violently beat the defender, breaking three of his ribs.

On 14 March, Nguyen Thuy Hạnh and Trương Văn Dũng travelled together to attend a public protest activity. While departing from the event at approximately 11am, Nguyen Thuy Hạnh was taken into police custody without warrant or explanation. The defender was taken to the Number 3 Nguyễn Gia Thiều Reception of the Ministry of Public Security, where she was questioned for several hours on her attendance at the protest, her fundraising activities for prisoners, and her dissemination of copies of a book by another human rights defender, [Pham Doan Trang](#). At approximately 6pm, seven hours after her arrest, the defender was finally allowed to notify family of her whereabouts. She was released from detention at 10pm that evening.

Upon learning of Nguyen Thuy Hạnh's location, a group of friends planned to meet at the prison to call for her release. Trương Văn Dũng arrived first at the station and was waiting outside for Nguyen Thuy Hạnh's other supporters when he was asked by two plainclothes officers to accompany them inside.

Trương Văn Dũng was subsequently forced to empty his pockets and his wallet was confiscated. When police asked to be granted access to his iPhone, the human rights defender refused, shattering the phone on the table. Police officers then attacked Trương Văn Dũng, striking his face and body, kicking and stamping on him. After the defender lost consciousness, an attempt was made to put him in a taxi. When the taxi driver refused to take an unconscious passenger, one of the officers accompanied him and left the human rights defender lying on the street near his home. Trương Văn Dũng lost two teeth as a result of the beating and was hospitalised later that evening for his injuries.

Front Line Defenders condemns the physical assault on Trương Văn Dũng and the

arbitrary detention of Nguyen Thuy Hạnh as it believes both acts were carried out in relation to their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Vietnam to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assault of Trương Văn Dũng and the arbitrary detention of Nguyen Thuy Hạnh, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Ensure that adequate measures are taken to protect detainees in Public Security facilities;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Vietnam are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.