

The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

August 21, 2021

Re: The United States' role in advancing press freedom in Vietnam

Dear Madam Vice President,

On May the 4, the world, for the first time heard the following words about press freedom from a female and an African and Asian American vice president of the United States:

“A free press is critical to democracy. On this #WorldPressFreedomDay, we recognize the courage of journalists around the world. And we recommit ourselves to protecting and promoting a free and independent press everywhere.”¹

We can't agree with you more about the role of press freedom in society. And because of that, seven years ago, we started to advocate for a free press in Vietnam by practicing it ourselves with a nonprofit media organization. Although most of us are Vietnamese nationals, we were able to register as a 501(c)(3) entity in your home state of California and enjoy the freedom that the United States provides for a group of foreigners like us to operate as an independent organization.

Unfortunately, in October last year, the Vietnamese government arrested and charged one of our co-founders and editors, **journalist Pham Thi Doan Trang**, with a national security crime of spreading propaganda against the state.² Since then, she has been held incommunicado, denied visitation from her family and her lawyers, and she faces up to 20 years of imprisonment.

Ms. Pham is one of the best journalists Vietnam has had since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Furthermore, she's one of the most dedicated democracy activists and

¹ See: <https://twitter.com/vp/status/1389354153487618050>

² Pham Thi Doan Trang's profile: <https://doantrang.liv.ngo>

someone who has spent the past 12 years fighting for a peaceful transition to democracy in Vietnam. As a result of her work, she has been awarded the Homo Homini Prize from People in Need (Czech Republic) in 2017 and the Press Freedom Award by Reporters Without Borders (France) in 2019.

It is significant to note that Ms. Pham couldn't make it to a meeting with President Barack Obama in May 2016 in Hanoi because Vietnam's police kidnapped her shortly before the meeting.

Madam Vice President, Ms. Pham spent almost a year as a fellow at the University of Southern California learning about the events and the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. That movement inspires her and also inspires us.

We urge you to uphold the inspiration that the American people and democracy have been promoting around the world and that you will bring the following matters to the table with the Vietnamese government during your visit to Vietnam:

- Release the detained and imprisoned journalists, including Ms. Pham Thi Doan Trang, unconditionally;
- Stop blocking independent websites, such as our magazines luatkhoa.org and thevietnamese.org, from internet users in Vietnam.

We count on your support to make the media environment in Vietnam freer and more inclusive so that voices such as Ms. Pham's can be heard once again, and positive changes can be made.

We thank you for your attention, and we wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

Legal Initiatives for Vietnam