

## Joint Statement on Viet Nam's Transnational Repression in Thailand

While the EU recently elevated its relationship with Viet Nam to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, civic space within Viet Nam continues to shrink. This repression is no longer contained within Viet Nam's borders. Recent high-level state visits between Thai and Vietnamese authorities have signaled a dangerous tightening of bilateral security cooperation, extending beyond legitimate security objectives and encompassing the illegitimate targeting of individuals for political reasons. Against this backdrop, we are witnessing the construction of a legal, physical and psychological apparatus targeting Vietnamese dissidents in Thailand:

- The Vietnamese and Thai governments have pledged to move forward with negotiations on a bilateral **Extradition Treaty** and a Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. However, there is a lack of public information and transparency regarding the timeline, scope, and content of these negotiations. We are highly concerned that these treaties will establish a legal framework allowing for and facilitating arbitrary arrests, detentions, and forcible returns of political dissidents by the Thai and Vietnamese authorities under the guise of "criminal cooperation". Indeed, there is significant evidence that such human rights violations may already be happening.
- Leading up to and during recent bilateral visits, Thai authorities intensified monitoring and security measures in areas where Vietnamese refugees reside, specifically targeting **Montagnard refugee** communities. These communities were already under significant strain following the forcible return of prominent Montagnard human rights defender **Y Quynh Bdap** to Viet Nam in 2025, pursuant to an extradition request. Vietnamese activists living in exile in Bangkok have reported visible, intimidating surveillance by plainclothes operatives credibly reported to be working on behalf of or in cooperation with Vietnamese security services. This environment has become so hostile that multiple activists have been forced to temporarily flee their residences as a basic precautionary measure.
- Vietnamese journalists living in exile face particularly acute risks. Many continue their reporting under the constant threat of harassment, surveillance, and retaliation, forcing them to remain vigilant and maintain a low profile even after seeking refuge abroad. The case of **journalist Truong Duy Nhat** illustrates these dangers. In 2019, while seeking asylum in Thailand, he disappeared under circumstances that strongly suggest he was abducted by Vietnamese agents and subjected to an enforced disappearance. He subsequently reappeared in Vietnamese custody and was sentenced in March 2020 to 10 years' imprisonment. A similar fate befell **journalist and human rights defender Duong Van Thai**, who was allegedly abducted in 2023 while living in exile in Thailand, and was later found arbitrarily detained in Viet Nam, where he was subsequently sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in 2024. In the most recent case, **Le Chi Thanh, a Vietnamese anti-corruption activist and social media advocate**, has been detained since March 2026 at Bangkok's Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre (IDC), after Thai authorities claimed that his work permit became invalid following the cancellation of his passport by Vietnamese authorities. Le Chi Thanh was not notified of this cancellation prior to his arrest. All of these incidents involve dissidents who were recognized refugees in Thailand or otherwise had a well-founded fear of persecution or

of being subjected to torture or other human rights violations upon their return to Viet Nam.

These expanding Vietnamese-Thai cross-border co-operations stand in stark contrast to the commitments underpinning the newly upgraded EU-Viet Nam relationship. Under Paragraph 48 of the Joint Statement on the new Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the EU and Viet Nam, both sides explicitly stated their "commitment to respect, protect, fulfill and promote human rights in line with international treaties" and to "enhance cooperation in legal and judicial matters, and exchange experience in the development and refinement of the rule-of-law state". By strengthening the means for transnational repression (TNR), Viet Nam is acting in breach of those commitments and of its legal obligations under international human rights law. The EU should insist on compliance with those commitments and heed the calls repeatedly formulated by the European Parliament on TNR.

### **Recommendations to the EU**

1. **Take the opportunity of the human rights dialogue to raise concern about the above-mentioned TNR**, including instances where extraditions were carried out in violations of both Thailand and Viet Nam's international human rights and refugee law obligations, push for concrete deliverables to put an end to TNR abusive practices, and establish spaces for regular engagement with Thailand and Viet Nam on their delivery. Expressions of concern should not be relegated merely to yearly human rights dialogues, but be part of a concerted, preventive and responsive approach aimed at persuading authorities in both countries to cease these TNR abusive practices.
2. **Use all tools at the EU and its member states' disposal to hold Vietnamese and Thai officials accountable for human rights violations**, including by ensuring that TNR is raised in all exchanges up to the highest level, such as those concerning security, trade, technology and development.

The EU should make it clear to **Viet Nam** that TNR and other serious human rights abuses are in breach of its commitments under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) and obligations under the bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and EU-Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), and should publicly lay out consequences for the continuation of such abuses. The EU should demand that Viet Nam stop the intimidation, surveillance, and the extradition requests of persons targeted for political reasons or solely for exercising human rights, including human rights defenders and journalists located outside of Viet Nam.

The EU should also use its diplomatic engagement with **Thailand**, referencing existing human rights obligations under the PCA and potential future ones under the FTA (currently under negotiation), to urge Thai authorities not to facilitate or be complicit in TNR. Thai authorities should thoroughly and impartially investigate allegations of harassment, intimidation, threats, surveillance, and forced returns from Thailand by foreign governments or their agents against migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Thailand, and the role of Thai officials in those abuses. They should cooperate with civil society to devise and implement policies to prevent and address TNR. Thailand should ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol,

and ensure that Thai immigration legislation and other laws, regulations, and policies fully comply with international human rights law and standards, including Thailand's obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture and the UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

3. **Urge transparency and safeguards in the Extradition Treaty.** Through diplomatic channels in the respective capitals, the EU and its member states should urge transparency regarding the ongoing Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty negotiations between Thailand and Vietnam. The EU should firmly call on both parties to ensure that any signed agreement include clauses preventing the extradition of individuals for political reasons or solely for the legitimate exercise of their human rights, and guaranteeing strict compliance with the non-refoulement principle, which prohibits the removal of any person to a place where they face a real risk of torture or other ill-treatment, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and other serious human rights violations, such as grossly unfair trials.
4. **Establish local protection mechanisms via EU Delegations.** EU Delegations and EU member-state embassies in third countries, such as Thailand, should rapidly scale up physical protection and trial monitoring. EU officials should:
  - Conduct regular field visits to at-risk Vietnamese and Montagnard refugee communities with a view to assessing their plight and promoting oversight of human rights compliance in any agreements made with the EU.
  - Formally observe and assess any local detention or immigration hearings involving Vietnamese nationals facing potential expulsion, transfer, or removal.
  - Publicly voice opposition to instances of cross-border law enforcement overreach.
5. **Support the issuance of emergency visas and resettlement for at-risk activists.** Recognizing that Thailand is unsafe due to growing security cooperation with Viet Nam, EU member states should create emergency humanitarian visa pathways and prioritize the resettlement of Vietnamese activists and human rights defenders at risk and currently subject to active surveillance.
6. **Call out the abusive implementation of cross-border law enforcement interventions.** The EU should denounce Vietnam's domestic abusive invocation of national security and other laws (including articles 116, 117, and 331 of the 2015 Penal Code) and express concern about legislative measures that are inconsistent with international human rights law
7. **Address digital transnational repression and platform complicity.** The EU should take effective measures to ensure that no "digital transformation" or cybersecurity cooperation under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership equips Vietnamese security agencies with surveillance, data access, or identity verification capabilities - including biometric or DNA systems – that conflict with human rights standards or pose risks to human rights in practice. The EU should leverage the Digital Services Act and direct engagement with platforms to pressure technology companies to resist Viet Nam's extraterritorial takedown and geo-blocking demands targeting diaspora speech. Companies should publish transparency data on Vietnamese government requests, and notify affected users. The EU should fund digital-security

support and rapid-response protection for at-risk Vietnamese activists, both in Thailand and within EU member states.

**Signatories:**

- 1. Amnesty International**
- 2. ARTICLE 19**
- 3. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**
- 4. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation**
- 5. Cross Cultural Foundation (CrCF)**
- 6. Free Press Unlimited (FPU)**
- 7. Human Rights Foundation (HRF)**
- 8. Human Rights Watch**
- 9. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)**
- 10. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)**
- 11. Legal Initiatives for Vietnam (LIV)**
- 12. Manushya Foundation**
- 13. People in Need (PIN)**
- 14. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)**
- 15. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR)**
- 16. Vietnamese Advocates for Change (VAC)**
- 17. Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR)**
- 18. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)**