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SOS-Torture Network
The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders



Vietnam Committee
on Human Rights

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

VIETNAM: Deadly attack against a journalist

Geneva-Paris, February 3, 2011. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights & Quê Me : Action for Democracy in Vietnam, condemn the murder of Mr. Le Hoang Hung, an investigative journalist.*

On January 30, 2011, Mr. Le Hoang Hung, who worked for the *Nguoi Lao Dong* (Worker) newspaper, succumbed to severe injuries in a Ho Chi Minh hospital.

On January 20, 2011, at around 1 a.m. while Mr. Hung and his family were sleeping, an unknown assailant entered his house in Tan An town. He doused the reporter with chemicals and set him on fire. Mr. Hung suffered third-degree burns on around 20 percent of his body and died ten days later. Prior to the attack, Mr. Hung received several threatening text messages on his mobile phone from unknown numbers. The police have started to investigate the case. So far, no suspects have been identified or arrests made.

Mr. Le Hoang Hung had written on issues affecting the southern Mekong Delta for nearly ten years. In one of his most recent reports, he investigated alleged official misconduct regarding land disputes. The attack took place the evening before he was due to cover a court case in which a local authority in the southern province of Long An is sued for illegal appropriation of land.

The Observatory and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights are concerned that this assassination took place in a climate where freedom of expression in Vietnam is already highly restricted. Despite declarations from the Government in favour of the freedom of expression, in particular within the framework of the 2009 Universal Periodic Review (UPR)¹, a new decree was issued on January 6, 2011, to regulate the activities of journalists and bloggers². Under this decree, which will come into force on February 25, 2011, the publication of information “non-authorized”, “not in the interests of people” or which reveals “state secrets” will be considered an offense. Moreover, the decree provides new fines for journalists who refuse to divulgate their sources or publish articles under pseudonyms. As a result, this decree will give the authorities even greater powers to penalise journalists, editors and bloggers in a media situation already over-regulated and highly suppressed³.

The Observatory and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights urge the Vietnamese authorities to order an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the murder of Mr. Le Hoang Hung which seems to have been merely aimed at sanctioning and silencing the legitimate exercise of his work. The authorities should prosecute all those responsible and try them before a competent and impartial tribunal.

¹ “All citizens have the right to express their aspiration, opinions and comments on all political, economic and social issues on the mass media [and] Viet Nam encourages the use of the Internet (...) [and] the development and use of blogs.” Extract from Human Rights Council, *Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review*, UN Document A/HRC/12/11/Add.1, September 16, 2009.

² Decree n°211.

³ In Vietnam, there are more than 700 newspapers and magazines but all are controlled by the Communist Party of Vietnam.

More generally, our organisations strongly condemn the disturbing situation of freedom of expression and the press in Vietnam and call upon the Vietnamese authorities to put an end to any kind of harassment - including at the judicial level - against journalists and all human rights defenders in the country, in conformity with the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as well as with international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Viet Nam.

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