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#StandwithBach

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International NGOs Call for Release of Prominent Environmental Defender in Vietnam One Year After 5-Year Prison Sentence

Environmental Lawyer Dang Dinh Bach Is One of Several Silenced by the Vietnamese Government After Attempts to Wean the Country Off of Coal and Protect Communities from Public Health Hazards

International NGOs are rallying around prominent environmental lawyer Dang Dinh Bach on the one-year anniversary of his five-year prison sentence in Vietnam with the launch of the standwithbach.org website and the #StandwithBach social media campaign calling for his immediate release.

Numerous civil society organizations including Global Witness, Friends of the Earth US, Earthrights International, International Land Coalition, Grassroots Foundation and International Rivers are supporting the campaign and calling on the Vietnamese Government to immediately release Bach. The groups are also demanding that G7 nations providing multi-billion dollar funding for Vietnam's [just energy transition](#) support this call since it will be impossible to successfully implement the transition while environmental and climate leaders such as Bach are in jail.

"Bach is one of several environmental leaders to be charged with tax offenses that are increasingly being used to silence civil society in Vietnam," said Maureen Harris, Senior Advisor from International Rivers. "The growing criminalization of environmental leaders in Vietnam must end."

Bach was imprisoned for "tax evasion" after leading a campaign to reduce Vietnam's reliance on coal. As the founder of the Law and Policy of Sustainable Development Research Centre, he has dedicated his life to protecting communities from harmful pollution, phasing out plastic waste, and supporting the government's transition to clean energy. He has engaged in numerous hunger strikes to protest his conviction and Vietnam's use of ambiguous tax laws to silence environmental and climate leaders.

"I never imagined that Bach would be imprisoned for the work he has done to help people," said his wife, Thao, in [this video](#), also released as part of the #StandwithBach campaign. "His top priority has always been the health and well-being of the people of Vietnam." She also recently wrote this op-ed: [This Lunar New Year, I Want My Husband Home](#).

Bach was not granted a fair trial. He was not allowed to meet with his lawyer until seven months after he was arrested and his sentence was much harsher than is usual for people accused of tax evasion. United Nations experts suggest that Bach's prosecution was [politically motivated](#).

Bach is one of several environmental defenders who have been imprisoned in Vietnam since June 2021 on charges of income tax evasion. Serving nearly two years is internationally-renowned climate expert and Goldman Environmental Prize winner [Ms. Nguy Thi Khanh](#). Khanh worked with provincial governments to reduce the government's coal expansion plans, raised public awareness of the link between coal plant emissions and Hanoi having some of the worst air pollution in the world, and conducted research and policy engagement to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of solar solutions in Vietnam.

All of this and more paved the way for Vietnam's [commitment to net zero emissions by 2050](#) and the subsequent [\\$15.5 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership](#) (JETP) recently announced between G7 nations and Vietnam. Such an ambitious undertaking cannot be successfully implemented while people like Khanh, Bach and others are unable to participate in the implementation process.

"It is shocking that environmental defenders in Vietnam are being jailed for working to protect ordinary Vietnamese from the worst impacts of climate change or for ensuring Vietnam moves rapidly towards a clean, affordable energy transition," said Shruti Suresh, Land & Environmental Defenders Campaign Strategy Lead from Global Witness. "G7 nations supporting Vietnam's JET-P must ensure that civil society and environmental defenders in Vietnam are able to meaningfully participate in this process, and not be punished as a result."

Civil society activists report that Vietnam's tax laws are unclear and unjust and that authorities are using loopholes to stifle civil society voices. Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council have [relayed its concerns](#) about Vietnam's vague tax laws being used to detain civil society leaders, saying NGOs have, "unreasonably burdensome requirements for their reporting, registration of funding and projects."

The United Nations has called upon the Government of Vietnam to revise its overbroad and vague tax provisions due to their chilling effect on civil society and the ability of non-governmental associations to operate in the country.

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