

For Immediate Release
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COP28: Civil Society Groups Convene at COP28 to Demand Urgent Release of Vietnam's Climate Defenders

Dubai, UAE – Following last week's release of Vietnam's Resource Mobilization Plan – an implementation plan detailing how the country intends to operationalize its energy transition package – civil society organizations including 350.org, Global Witness, International Rivers, and CEED International took part in events at COP28 to demand the urgent release of imprisoned climate defenders in the country. The recording of a press conference held on December 6 from COP 28 can be found [here](#).

There is a concerning trend of criminalizing climate defenders around the world that demands the movement's full support. Hoang Thi Minh Hong 'Hong' and Danh Dinh Bach are two of several prominent Vietnamese climate activists currently serving sentences in Vietnam. 'Hong', a former 350.org staff member, was formally sentenced to three years imprisonment for tax evasion on September 28th, 2023 with. Today at COP28, Vietnam is nominated for CAN International's 'Fossil of the Day' award due to the ongoing issue of arbitrary detainment of environmental activists.

Cansin Leylim, 350.org Associate Director of Global Campaigns said:

"Transition deals like the JETP cannot be considered just if those that have fought the hardest to secure a better future for their country have been put behind bars. We are calling for the urgent release of Hong and the environmental defenders fighting for a liveable planet.

Agnes Hall, 350.org Director of Global Campaigns said:

"Around the world, Civic space is shrinking. It's becoming increasingly risky for people to publicly critique government policy, protest or lobby for climate justice. When people do speak out, many are persecuted or even jailed. The end result of this is that, in many places, we don't have democratic participation in the creation of policies; nor do we have the power of collective voices holding decision-makers to account, which we so strongly need in the fight for climate justice"

Guneet Kaur, International Rivers' Environmental Defenders Campaign Coordinator said:

"These 6 remarkable individuals, climate leaders, human rights defenders, have been arrested by Vietnam and have been the ones advocating for a transition away from coal in Vietnam and paved the way for Vietnam's JETP. These include Danh Dinh Bach, Hoang Thi Minh Hong.

This is a high stakes situation. There is no safeguard for environmental human rights defenders within the JETP framework, later on we don't know whether there will be a meaningful energy transition. In the RMP we see a lot of false solutions – we need to see these environmental defenders to point out the gaps between what the government is committing on the international stage and what is between the fine lines where there is a lot of investment in coal again and again."

Shruti Suresh, Global Witness' Interim Co-Director of Campaigns said:

"We are in a decade of critical climate action, but we are seeing over the world that civic space is shrinking. Every other day a defender is killed, but killings are not the only forms of attacks. Criminalization is the most used form of attack and has the guise of legality, so governments and corporations that use it get away with it. The human rights organization Frontline Defenders found that criminalization is the most prominent form of attacking environmental defenders.

It is not just about what could happen immediately in arbitrary detention but the threat of what could happen in the future in meaningful dialogue, like now, when we are talking about a just energy transition. Governments can take many years to investigate corporate abuses but are super quick to take action against environmental defenders."

Gerry Arances, Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (CEED)

"Of the money currently pledged to Vietnam in its Resource Mobilization Plan, over 90% comes in the form of loans instead of grants. Of this, half will come with market-level interest rates. We wonder how Vietnam's developed country partners can call this a contribution to a just energy transition, when ultimately it is the Vietnamese people who will pay for it. We are in solidarity with our Vietnamese colleagues in calling for a just, full, and swift transition to renewable energy, the protection of human rights, and the delivery of resources due to climate-vulnerable countries like Vietnam."

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