

20 January 2021

Vietnam: Woman human rights defender Đinh Thị Thu Thủy charged and sentenced

On 20 January 2021, the People’s Court of Hau Giang sentenced woman human rights defender **Đinh Thị Thu Thủy** to seven years in prison. The woman defender was charged under Article 117 of the Penal Code, which relates to conducting anti-state propaganda. Đinh Thị Thu Thủy has been in detention since her arrest from her apartment in Ho Chi Minh City on 18 April 2020.

[Đinh Thị Thu Thủy](#) is a woman human rights defender and an engineer. As a woman human rights defender, she has been a strong advocate for freedom of expression and environmental rights, and has been outspoken against the negative implications of overseas investment projects.

On 20 January 2021, at her first- instance hearing, the People’s Court of Hau Giang sentenced Đinh Thị Thu Thủy to seven years in prison. The woman defender has been charged with “making, storing, disseminating or propagandising information, materials and products that aim to oppose the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” under article 117 of the Penal Code of 2015. Đinh Thị Thu Thủy was arrested on 18 April 2020 for allegedly creating several Facebook accounts to disseminate articles to distort Vietnam’s policies and to defame its leadership. She was also accused by authorities of criticizing the communist regime’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The woman human rights defender was held in incommunicado detention for seven months until November 2020, when she was finally allowed to have contact with her family. Đinh Thị Thu Thủy was granted access to her lawyer for the first time in December 2020, eight months after her detention. The woman defender is a single mother to a nine year old girl and has been under severe psychological stress due to lack of visitation and contact with her family.

In the past two years, Đinh Thị Thu Thủy has come under frequent judicial harassment, persecution, and surveillance by the Vietnamese authorities. After her participation in a mass peaceful demonstration in Ho Chi Minh City on June 2018, which protested two bills, the Special Economic Zone Bill and the Cyber Security Bill, the woman human rights defender was detained, beaten, interrogated, and fined before being released. The Special Economic Zone bill sought to favour Chinese investments in the country, in spite of existing disputes amongst the two countries and the environmental repercussions of such investments. The Cyber Security Bill, which has since been passed to become law, strives to curb any form of online dissent or criticism against the government.

Đinh Thị Thu Thủy’s sentencing comes after the [sentencing](#) of three human rights defenders, Nguyen Tuong Thuy, Le Huu Minh Tuan and Pham Chi Dung under the same charges under Article 117 of the Penal Code. On 14 January 2020, UN experts, in a [press release](#), condemned the recent arrests in Vietnam and the dangerous and blatant usage of Article 117 of the Penal Code to silence critical voices and further restrict the right to freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest and sentencing of woman human rights defender Đinh Thị Thu Thủy. It is concerned about the shrinking space for exercising the right to freedom of expression in the country and the ongoing judicial harassment of human rights defenders. Front Line Defenders believes that Đinh Thị Thu Thủy, like other human rights defenders recently arrested, is being targeted solely for her peaceful work in defence of human rights in Vietnam.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Vietnam to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Đinh Thị Thu Thủy, and drop the charges against her, as Front Line Defenders believes that she is being targeted solely as a result of her legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Grant Đinh Thị Thu Thủy immediate and unfettered access to her family and lawyers.
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Vietnam are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals, and free of all restrictions including police and judicial harassment.

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