

Vietnam: Activists Blocked from Ukraine Event

End Politically Motivated Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Wednesday 30 March 2022, by [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) (Date first published: 16 March 2022).

(Bangkok) - The [Vietnamese](#) authorities stopped several pro-democracy supporters from attending [an event](#) in Hanoi in support of [Ukraine](#) on March 5, 2022, following the [Russian](#) invasion, Human Rights Watch said today. The Ukrainian Embassy was holding “a charity bazaar dedicated to raising funds for people in need in Ukraine.”

The Vietnamese government routinely violates freedom of movement and other basic rights by subjecting activists, dissidents, human rights defenders, and others to indefinite house arrest, harassment, and other forms of detention to keep them from attending protests, criminal trials, meetings with foreign dignitaries, and other events. At times, the authorities detain people just long enough to make them miss the event.

“Vietnamese security agents frequently restrict activists’ movements, blocking them from leaving their homes or neighborhood to prevent them from attending an event the government considers problematic,” said [Phil Robertson](#), deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Now the Vietnamese government has extended its policy of repressing activism by preventing people from showing support for the embattled people of Ukraine.”

Hoang Ha (known as Song Que), a rights supporter, reported that the evening before the Ukrainian charity event, security agents from ward and district levels asked her whether she planned to attend. On the morning of March 5, a [security agent in civilian clothes](#) prevented her from leaving her house even though she promised that she would only go to a friend’s house for lunch.

Dang Bich Phuong [wrote](#) on her Facebook page, “Ukrainian people, please sympathize with us. When we express our support for you online, our accounts got blocked. When we tried to take to the street to support you, they blocked our doors. At least, Ukrainian people enjoy more freedom than we do.” Among six friends that Dang Bich Phuong had invited to her house for lunch before heading to the charity event in the afternoon, only three were allowed to go to her house. Each of them brought along a “tail” of two security agents who were apparently told to prevent them from going to the bazaar after lunch. Dang Bich Phuong wrote that, when she went down to pick up the food she ordered, she saw “a row of six guys sitting in the lobby.” As a result, Dang Bich Phuong and her friends realized they would not be permitted to go to the bazaar.

Security agents prevented at least eight democracy campaigners from going to the Ukrainian Embassy’s event: Nguyen Xuan Dien, Hoang Ha, Nguyen Nguyen Binh, Nguyen Khanh Tram, Nguyen Van Vien, Pham Thi Lan (wife of [political prisoner Nguyen Tuong Thuy](#)), Dang Bich Phuong, and Nguyen Hoang Anh.

During the March 2, 2022 vote at the United Nations General Assembly on passage of a resolution calling on Russia to end its military offensive in Ukraine and denouncing Russia’s violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, Vietnam [abstained](#).

As Human Rights Watch detailed in its February report, "[Locked Inside Our Home: Movement Restrictions on Rights Activists in Vietnam](#)," the Vietnamese government frequently uses various methods to keep people under house arrest, such as stationing plainclothes security agents outside homes, using padlocks to lock people inside, erecting roadblocks and other barriers to prevent people from leaving their homes and others from entering, mobilizing neighborhood thugs to intimidate people into staying home, and applying very strong adhesives – such as “superglue” – on locks.

In a separate case on March 2, the poet Thai Hao left his house in Thanh Hoa for the airport. He planned to fly to Ho Chi Minh City to receive an award for poetry at an informal ceremony organized by the literary group Van Viet. Thai Hao [reported](#) that prior to his trip, security agents went to his house and “advised” him not to go. He was determined to go, but before he could get very far, uniformed police stopped him on the road. Two men in civilian clothes then crossed the street and attacked him, hitting him in the face.

Initially, the uniformed police did not intervene. Only when Thai Hao yelled repeatedly for help did the police at the scene tell the two men to stop hitting him. The police fined Thai Hao for violating traffic laws and took him to the police station, keeping him there for three hours. Thai Hao missed his flight and had to return home.

Hoang Hung, a poet involved in organizing the informal Van Viet gathering, [wrote](#) that the authorities prevented all invitees who lived outside of Ho Chi Minh City from attending the event. Those who lived in Ho Chi Minh City met at a café on March 3, surrounded by plainclothes security agents. When [one participant](#) raised a piece of paper with the names of the awardees, a security agent snatched the paper out of his hand.

On March 7, Van Viet published [a letter](#) that “denounces the government’s obstruction of its awards and harassment of its recipients.”

“Vietnamese police and security officers harass and abuse critics and rights activists in the most blatant ways, always with total impunity,” Robertson said. “Concerned governments should urgently condemn this litany of abuses and call for an end to the authorities’ violations of people’s right to freedom of movement because of their beliefs and speech.”

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- HRW. March 16, 2022 8:00AM EDT:
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/16/vietnam-activists-blocked-ukraine-event>