

URGENT ACTION

HUNDREDS OF PEACEFUL MARCHERS ATTACKED BY POLICE

Around 700 men, women and children were attacked by police while on the way to submit legal complaints against Formosa Plastics, with damages amounting to US\$20 million. The Taiwanese company, based in Hà Tĩnh province, has accepted responsibility for the April 2016 ecological disaster, which affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals.

In the early morning of 14 February 2017, approximately 700 people, mostly fishermen/women and others who rely on the fishing industry, gathered in Song Ngọc, Nghệ An province to submit 619 individual complaints in neighbouring Hà Tĩnh province against Formosa Plastics. Collectively, their complaints call for the compensation of approximately US\$20 million in damages for the devastation of fish stocks after the Formosa disaster in April 2016.

The group were travelling the 170 kilometers by foot and motorbike as the bus companies, who had agreed to transport them to Hà Tĩnh, withdrew their services after receiving threats by the authorities. Traveling together and closely followed by hundreds of armed police, the group encountered a road block 20 kilometers outside Song Ngọc with more police waiting, bringing the number to around 2,000 in total. While the peaceful marchers spoke with the authorities, they were attacked by dozens of men in plain clothes who, according to a witness, attacked men, women and children with their fists and feet. The men in plain clothes attacked those who were holding cameras and phones. A car containing ten people, including two who were livestreaming the event on Facebook, was towed from the scene – confirmed by a video posted on YouTube. While the violence only lasted a few minutes, the huge contingent of police looking on did nothing to stop it.

Once the violence had eased the, mainly Catholic, group sat on the ground and prayed. The witness, who helped coordinate the compiling of the legal complaints, believes that unidentified plain clothes men infiltrated the prayer group and threw stones at the police who, fired tear gas and what appear to have been flash grenades at the group. While running away, the group were again attacked, this time by police, with fists, rods and electric batons.

According to the witness interviewed by Amnesty International, at least 15 men were transported from the scene by police, beaten and abandoned in remote areas to find their own way home. Others were hospitalised, including one man who sustained a fractured spine and had four teeth knocked out, while three or four others remain in hospital with unknown injuries. Images circulated on social media show at least five people with serious head wounds.

Please write immediately in Vietnamese, English or your own language urging authorities to:

- Promptly investigate the attacks against the 700 people on the 14 February 2017 and bring those suspected of responsibility to account in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty;
- End the harassment of peaceful protestors in Viet Nam, and to respect and protect the human rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- Facilitate the lodging of complaints by those affected by the April 2016 ecological disaster.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 APRIL 2017 TO:

Prime Minister

Nguyễn Xuân Phúc
Prime Minister's Office
Hà Nội, Việt Nam
Email:
nguoiphatngonchinhphu@chinhphu.vn

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Public Security

To Lam
44 Yết Kiêu St. Hoàn Kiếm District Hà Nội,
Việt Nam
Fax: + 844 3823 1872
c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Email: ttl.mfa@mofa.gov.vn
Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy
Prime Minister
Phạm Bình Minh
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
1 Ton That Dam Street, Ba Dinh district
Hà Nội, Việt Nam
Fax: + 844 3823 1872

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR VAN THAO NGUYEN, Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 12-14 Victoria Road W8 5RD, 020 7937 1912, Fax 020 7565 3853, vanphong@vietnamembassy.org.uk, www.vietnamembassy.org.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The first signs of the Formosa ecological disaster came in April 2016 when huge levels of fish stocks were found dead in waters adjoining the coastal provinces of Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, Thừa Thiên-Huế and Nghệ An. As many as 270,000 people, including fishermen/women and others who rely on the fishing industry for their livelihoods as well as their families, have been affected by the deaths of millions of fish. After a two month investigation into the disaster, the government confirmed allegations by the public that a steel plant owned by the Taiwanese Formosa Plastics Group, based in Hà Tĩnh province, was the source of discharges of toxic waste into coastal waters. At the end of June, Formosa publicly apologised and announced that it would provide \$500 million USD in compensation, but those affected have said that this is insufficient reparation for the impact and loss of livelihoods.

On 29 September 2016, Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc issued Decision 1880 in which he outlined how the compensation would be distributed. The decision stated that only victims from the four provinces of Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, and Thừa Thiên-Huế would be included in the compensation scheme. The decision was made days after 506 complaints were filed with the People's Court in Hà Tĩnh province by people calling to have suffered damages as a result of the disaster. On 5 October, the 506 complaints were rejected on the reported grounds that the complainants failed to provide evidence of their material loss and on the procedural basis that a court is barred from making a ruling on an incident where a binding decision on the same issue has been made by a government entity. The 619 complaints that were prevented from being delivered to the People's Court in Hà Tĩnh province on 14 February 2017 are from individuals from Nghệ An, which is not included in the compensation scheme of Decision 1880.

The Formosa disaster has become an issue of major public concern in Viet Nam. The country has seen demonstrations on a previously unseen scale, both in terms of frequency and the number of participants. Authorities cracked down heavily in response to a series of demonstrations taking place throughout the country in May 2016 and, in October 2016, a demonstration against Formosa in Hà Tĩnh was reported to have involved as many as 20,000 participants. Wide-ranging police measures to prevent and punish participation in demonstrations resulted in a range of human rights violations including torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, as well as violations of the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of movement, see Public Statement, Viet Nam: Government crackdowns on peaceful demonstrations with range of rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa41/4078/2016/en/>.

Despite these heavy-handed tactics, peaceful protests have continued, but those involved in organizing and submitting additional formal complaints to the authorities are being increasingly targeted with harassment and threats. The harassment includes pressure on families and employers of those targeted, making it difficult for activists to continue.

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