

## Isolated Political Detainees at Risk of Torture

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(New York, May 20, 2010) — Three young activists who have campaigned for the rights of workers and victims of land confiscation in Vietnam should be immediately released from detention, Human Rights Watch said today. They have been held almost completely incommunicado since their arrests in February 2010.

Doan Huy Chuong, 25, was arrested February 11 in Tra Vinh province and taken to Ho Chi Minh City. Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung, 29, was arrested on February 24 in Dong Nai; and Do Thi Minh Hanh, 25, on February 23 in Lam Dong. Police reportedly told one of the families that the three were detained for distributing anti-government leaflets. However, it is unknown what charges, if any, have been filed against them.

“It’s been three months, and the clock is ticking endlessly,” said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Given Vietnam’s harsh treatment of political detainees, we’re concerned that the authorities might use cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment — or even torture — to extract confessions from these three young activists.”

Chuong is one of the founders of the United Workers-Farmers Organization (Hiep Hoi Doan Ket Cong Nong) and was previously imprisoned in 2006 for 18 months on charges of “abusing democratic freedoms.” Chuong’s father, Doan Van Dien, was arrested on the same charges in 2006, and he remains in B5 prison in Dong Nai province. Hung and Hanh were both active supporters of the petitioners’ movement called Victims of Injustice, which helps impoverished workers and landless farmers to seek redress from the government.

Since their arrests — which have not been covered in the Vietnamese state press — state authorities have barred access by the three to lawyers as well as their families, with the exception of one visit to Do Thi Minh Hanh by her mother on May 14.

Vietnamese prison authorities routinely mistreat and torture political detainees during interrogation to pressure them to sign pre-written confessions and to disclose information about other activists. During pre-trial detention, which can last up to 20 months, political detainees are often shackled in solitary confinement in dark cells and allowed out only for interrogation and abuse.

Holding people in incommunicado detention for three months without permitting them legal counsel constitutes prolonged arbitrary detention, which violates international human rights standards. Human Rights Watch called on the Vietnamese government to provide lawyers to the three immediately and to clarify the charges against them, or release them.