

Prime Minister
Nguyễn Xuân Phúc
Prime Minister's Office
Hà Nội
Việt Nam

22nd February, 2017

Your Excellency,

The reason I am writing to you is to express my most profound concerns regarding an attack against 700 peaceful protesters in Song Ngọc, Nghệ An province in the early morning of 14 February 2017.

The group of protesters was travelling 170 kilometres on foot and motorbikes to submit 619 individual complaints against Formosa Plastics in the neighbouring Hà Tĩnh province. They were demanding a compensation of approximately US\$20 million in damages caused by the devastation of fish stocks following the Formosa disaster in April 2016. Even though Formosa apologized and announced to provide US\$500 million as compensation, according to Decision 1880 this money is going to be distributed between the victims of four provinces Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, and Thừa Thiên-Huế, thus the inhabitants of the also affected Nghệ An province are not included. The peaceful protesters set out to submit their complaints were followed by the police and were blocked before they could reach Song Ngọc. Here they were attacked by men in plain clothes while others were taken away and beaten by the police. At least three or four of them remain hospitalized.

First and foremost I wish to plead to you to start an investigation into the attacks and bring those suspected of responsibility to account in fair trials. I would also like to urge you to facilitate the lodging of complaints by those affected by the April 2016 ecological disaster and make sure all people concerned are compensated according to their needs.

Ultimately, I wish to appeal to the Vietnamese authorities to put an end to the harassment of peaceful protesters in Vietnam. The people in Nghệ An were attacked solely for the peaceful expression of their discontent with the distribution of compensation for their losses. I am very concerned that although freedom of opinion and expression are guaranteed in the Constitution of Vietnam, the practice of these rights is strictly controlled by the state in law, effectively criminalizing those peacefully expressing their beliefs and opinions.

Yours sincerely,