



General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 February 2012

English only

Human Rights Council

Nineteenth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Internet freedom in Vietnam and Ethiopia

The government of Ethiopia controls most of the media and during the past ten years has been having the highest rate of journalists going into exile. There are some 450,000 internet users in Ethiopia, around 0.5 percent of the population. The country has one of the lowest internet rates south of the Sahara. Those who are online suffer from a thorough censorship.

Elias Kifle, a journalist working from the United States was sentenced to life imprisonment on January 26, 2012. He did not attend the trial. He had reported on banned opposition groups. In 2007 he had already received a life sentence in absentia. Back then, he had been charged with treason. Kifle had reported on government repression following the contentious 2005 elections.

The blogger Eskinder Nega was imprisoned 14 September 2011, after a column in which he asked the Ethiopian government to respect the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and the end of prison torture. Nega is charged with terrorism. He had already been detained in February 2011 and told to stop criticizing the government.

The NGO Reporters without Borders lists Vietnam - along with nine other countries - among its "Internet Enemies". It has very strict internet controls, which included blogs, Facebook and several Vietnamese-language websites of the democratic opposition abroad. Independent experts found evidence for official involvement in hacking attacks on websites and blogs that were critical of the government. Since August 2011, 17 bloggers were imprisoned.

In February 2011, a new executive decree came into force that provides new penalties for bloggers and journalists who report on national security issues. Therefore, in Vietnam most people who have a blog practice self-censorship, thus avoiding trouble with the authoritarian government.

The online commentator Vi Duc Hoc received an eight-year prison sentence in January 2011 plus five years of house arrest for publishing "propaganda against the state". In April 2011 his prison term was reduced to five years in prison and three years house arrest. A former high-ranking party member, Vi Duc Hoi focused on land right conflicts on his blog.

On August 10, 2011, the university mathematics professor and political blogger Pham Minh Hoang was sentenced to three years in prison and another three years of house arrest. He had been arrested in August 2010. He had published reports on corruption and environmental degradation. In December 2011 his sentence was reduced to 17 months, followed by a three-year house arrest.

Despite the expiration of his prison term the blogger and founder of "Free Journalists Network of Vietnam", Nguyen Van Hai on 18 October 2010, Van Hai is still in jail. He had been detained since April 2008 and had received a two-and-a-half-years prison sentence in September 2008 on trumped-up tax evasion charges. He has now been unaccounted for the last 16 months. He is reported in investigative detention.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of Ethiopia:

- to end the intimidation of bloggers
- to immediately release imprisoned online activists and journalists
- to guarantee the freedom of press and internet
- to withdraw the Anti-Terrorism-Law that is frequently used to jail

- those who are critical of the government.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of Vietnam:

- to end the intimidation of bloggers;
 - to immediate release of imprisoned online activists and journalists;
 - to guarantee the freedom of press and internet.
-