

June 20, 2023

Mr. Barack Obama
c/o Obama Foundation
Chicago, Illinois

Re: Arrest of Obama Foundation Scholar in Vietnam

Dear Mr. Obama,

We write to request your assistance in calling for the unconditional release from jail of Obama Foundation scholar Hoang Thi Minh Hong. Hong is one of 12 members of the very first cohort of your foundation. She is also the founder of the Center of Hands-on Action and Networking for Growth and Environment (CHANGE), an organization that advocates for action on climate change, the environment, and wildlife protection. CHANGE was a leading organization in the campaign to stop the construction and financing of new coal-fired power plants in Vietnam. Unfortunately, Hong was forced to close CHANGE in October 2022, after being harassed by the government.

Vietnamese police arrested Hong on June 1, 2023. She is being held incommunicado and has been denied access to a lawyer. The government is preparing to prosecute Hong on a false charge of tax evasion. She faces up to seven years behind bars and if found guilty, she may be subjected to a prison system that is known for torture and willful neglect.

Hong is the fifth climate activist to be jailed in the past two years in Vietnam for supposed tax evasion. Dang Dinh Bach, another jailed activist, was sentenced to five years in prison after he successfully advocated for the government to decarbonize the energy sector. A human rights investigation, published in April, documents clear evidence that these prosecutions are politically-driven and designed to criminalize climate activism using false charges of tax evasion.

The United Nations and the U.S. State Department have already made public statements calling for Hong's release. You have met Hong and praised her work, and your foundation continues to use her name and image on its website. Given this, it seems appropriate that you would join the UN and State Department by making your own public statement calling on the Vietnamese government to release her.

We would be happy to provide you more information on this important case. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



1. 350.org
2. 350Hawaii
3. 350 Silicon Valley
4. Accelerate Neighborhood Climate Action
5. Agency for Turkana Development Initiatives
6. Amnesty International
7. Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
8. Article 19
9. Asia Democracy Network
10. Asian NGO Coalition
11. Asia Pacific Network of Environmental Defenders
12. Center for Energy, Ecology and Development
13. Center for Environmental Concerns - Philippines Inc.
14. Center for Human Rights and Environment
15. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
16. Climate Rights International
17. EarthRights International
18. Environmental Defender Law Center
19. Extinction Rebellion Phoenix
20. FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights
21. Fortify Rights
22. FORUM-ASIA
23. Freedom House
24. Friends of the Earth Japan
25. Friends of the Earth US
26. Front Line Defenders
27. Global Network of Movement Lawyers at Movement Law Lab
28. Global Witness
29. Grassroots Foundation (Germany)
30. Greenpeace UK
31. Human Rights Foundation
32. Human Rights Watch
33. International Accountability Project
34. International Commission of Jurists
35. International Rivers
36. International Service for Human Rights
37. Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform
38. Manushya Foundation
39. Market Forces
40. Mekong Watch
41. Mighty Earth
42. North American Climate Conservation and Environment
43. Not1More
44. Nuclear Energy Information Service
45. Oil Change International
46. Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum
47. Peace Action WI
48. PowerShift e.V.
49. Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights
50. Protection International
51. Reclaim Finance
52. Recourse
53. Rivers & Mountains GreenFaith Circle
54. Sierra Leone Land Alliance
55. Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York
56. Social Eco Education
57. Terra Advocati
58. The 88 Project
59. Third Act
60. Trend Asia
61. Turtle Island Restoration Network
62. Unite North Metro Denver
63. Urgewald
64. Vietnamese Advocates for Changes
65. Vietnam Committee on Human Rights