

**To: Facebook**

**Subject: Open Letter to Mark Zuckerberg re: content takedowns and account suspensions in Vietnam**

April 9, 2018

Dear Mark,

As you consider ways to ensure Facebook continues to be the platform that makes the world a more open and connected place, we urge you to reconsider your company's aggressive practices that could silence human rights activists and citizen journalists in Vietnam.

We are a group of Vietnamese civil society members, human rights defenders, and independent media organizations affected by frequent account suspensions and content takedown. We're often in contact with Facebook representatives, working with your team to ensure that content remains online. Prior to 2017, your company's assistance has been fruitful. Since last year, however, the frequency of takedown has increased and Facebook's assistance has been unhelpful in restoring accounts and content. So unhelpful, in fact, that before and during a major trial of Vietnamese activists on April 5th, many accounts and pages of high-profile citizen journalists were prevented from posting.

**Is Facebook coordinating with a government known for cracking down on expression?**

Despite the Vietnamese government's repeated attempts to block Facebook, it has become the number one social media platform in Vietnam with over 55 million users. In a society where free speech and media rights are systematically and often violently suppressed, Facebook is a beacon for openness and connectivity. It serves as a platform for independent media and has enabled Vietnamese people to participate in public debates, as these freedoms are severely restricted offline. For the Vietnamese government, this hostile view toward netizens engaging in peaceful discussion has not changed since their first attempt to block Facebook in 2009.

The Vietnamese government has gone on the record in employing a 10,000-strong cyber army, whose sole purpose is to spread misinformation and silence dissent. These state-sponsored trolls – Force 47 – have deftly exploited Facebook's community policies and purposefully disseminated patently fake news about activists and independent media organizations. There are online groups of government trolls coordinating mass reporting of activist accounts and celebrating their accomplishments when accounts and pages are taken down by Facebook. A prime example is "*Thông tin chống phản động*" (Information against subversives) at [fb.com/thongtinchongphandong](https://fb.com/thongtinchongphandong).

In April 2017, we were dismayed to learn that Facebook's Head of Global Policy Management Monika Bickert met with the Vietnamese Minister of Information and Communications Truong Minh Tuan and reportedly agreed to coordinate in the monitoring and removal of content.

We appreciate Facebook's efforts in addressing safety and misinformation concerns online in Vietnam and around the world. Yet it would appear that after this high profile agreement to coordinate with a government that is known for suppressing expression online and jailing activists, the problem of account suspension and content takedown has only grown more acute.

As you probably know, Vietnam's government does not tolerate dissent and rejects the notion that there are any political prisoners. Yet it is a fact that the Vietnamese government has jailed more than 100 bloggers and human rights defenders, as documented by human rights organizations.

### **Why exactly is content being taken down?**

While Facebook's community standards are clearly stated on your website, the takedowns and account suspensions have happened without the affected users being told the reasons for the violation or the specific content that is in violation. We've tried to work with Facebook representatives, often alongside digital rights organizations, to address specific incidents. Yet when profiles of activists and citizen journalists are banned from posting or effectively suspended, we are given no explanation—other than the vague “violation of standards.” We find this lack of transparency concerning and unhelpful.

While we applaud Facebook's efforts to fight disinformation in open societies, your efforts are carried out with such a broad brush that it is hurting communities in closed and closing spaces, such as Vietnam. It is putting severe limitations on the very audience that you are trying to serve. We urge you to have a direct and open dialogue with local stakeholders. Without a nuanced approach, Facebook risks enabling and being complicit in government censorship.

We are committed to working with you and your team to let all Vietnamese people have a voice and stay connected.

Sincerely,

**Câu Lạc Bộ Nhà Báo Tự Do** (Free Journalists Club) | [fb.com/caulacbonhabaotudo](https://fb.com/caulacbonhabaotudo)

**Chân Trời Mới Media** (New Horizon Media) | [fb.com/chantroimoimedia](https://fb.com/chantroimoimedia)

**Dân Oan Dương Nội** (Duong Noi Aggrieved Citizens) | [fb.com/trinhbaphuong.trinhba](https://fb.com/trinhbaphuong.trinhba)

**Defend the Defenders** | [fb.com/defendthedefenders](https://fb.com/defendthedefenders)

**Hoang Sa FC** | [fb.com/hsfcvn](https://fb.com/hsfcvn) (suspended)

**Hội Anh Em Dân Chủ** (Brotherhood for Democracy) | [fb.com/hoianhemdanchu](https://fb.com/hoianhemdanchu)

**Hội Giáo Chức Chu Văn An** (CVA Teachers Association) | [fb.com/hoigiaochucchuvanan](https://fb.com/hoigiaochucchuvanan)

**Hội Thánh Tin Lành Mennonite Cộng Đồng** | [fb.com/tamlinh.tran.188](https://fb.com/tamlinh.tran.188)

**PT Lao Động Việt** (Viet Labor Movement) | [fb.com/phongtraolaodongviet](https://fb.com/phongtraolaodongviet)

**Sài Gòn Báo** (Saigon Post) | [fb.com/saigonposts](https://fb.com/saigonposts)

**Saigon Broadcasting Television Network** | [fb.com/SBTNOfficial](https://fb.com/SBTNOfficial)

**Tin Mừng Cho Người Nghèo** (Good News For The Poor) | [fb.com/tinmungchonguoiingheo](https://fb.com/tinmungchonguoiingheo)

**Thanh Niên Công Giáo** (Catholic Youth) | [fb.com/thanhnienconggiao](https://fb.com/thanhnienconggiao) (suspended)

**Truyền Thông Thái Hà** (Thai Ha Church's Media) | [fb.com/nhathothaiha](https://fb.com/nhathothaiha)

**Tuổi Trẻ Lòng Nhân Ái** (Compassionate Youth) | [fb.com/Tuổi-Trẻ-Lòng-Nhân-Ái-955756777816551](https://fb.com/Tuổi-Trẻ-Lòng-Nhân-Ái-955756777816551)

**Việt Tân** | [fb.com/viettan](https://fb.com/viettan)

Activists & Citizen Journalists:

**Angelina Trang Huynh** | [fb.com/angelinahuyh2004](https://fb.com/angelinahuyh2004)

**Anh Chi** | [fb.com/nu.pontaultcombault2010](https://fb.com/nu.pontaultcombault2010)

**Can Thi Theu** | [fb.com/profile.php?id=100004583148627](https://fb.com/profile.php?id=100004583148627)

**Dang Xuan Dieu** | [fb.com/TS.DangXuanDieu](https://fb.com/TS.DangXuanDieu)

**Do Thi Minh Hanh** | [fb.com/tiachopnho.minhhanh](https://fb.com/tiachopnho.minhhanh)

**Effy Nguyen** | fb.com/boy.zing.14  
**Emily Page-Le** | fb.com/emily.pagele (suspended)  
**Hoang Tu Duy** | fb.com/hoangtuduy  
**La Viet Dung** | fb.com/lavietdung  
**Le Cong Dinh** | fb.com/LSLeCongDinh  
**Le Van Dung** | fb.com/AlfonsoVova (suspended)  
**Ma Tieu Linh** | fb.com/profile.php?id=100007923318405  
**Ngoc Vu** | fb.com/ngoc.vu.33821  
**Nguyen Thuy Hanh** | fb.com/Melinh.liberty  
**Paulus Le Son** | fb.com/son.vanle85  
**Nguyen Chi Tuyen** (Anh Chi) | fb.com/N.AnhChi  
**Nguyen Hoang-Thanh Tam** | fb.com/nhttam  
**Nguyen Thien Nhan** | fb.com/nguyen.t.nhan.923  
**Nguyen Thuy Quynh** | fb.com/MotLanDiLaVinhBiet  
**Nguyen Van Hai** | fb.com/dieucayclbnbtdvietnam  
**Nhan The Hoang** | fb.com/culoo.hoang  
**Pham Minh Hoang** | fb.com/phamminh.hoang.351  
**Pham Thanh** | fb.com/profile.php?id=100005584186799  
**Pham Le Vuong Cac** | fb.com/cui.cac  
**Tran Minh Nhat** | fb.com/minhnhat.paultran  
**Trang Le** | fb.com/matbiec1904  
**Trinh Ba Phuong** | fb.com/trinhbaphuong.trinhba  
**Truc Ho** | fb.com/nhacsitrucho  
**Truong Dung** | fb.com/truong.v.dung.73  
**Tu Anh Tu** | fb.com/chutichdangbia  
**Vo An Don** | fb.com/profile.php?id=100008231020747