



4.28.16

VIETNAM | Government Urged to Investigate Alleged Torture

The Vietnamese government was urged to investigate allegations that activist Tran Thi Hong was tortured by the local authorities before and after meeting with the U.S. Ambassador for International Religious Freedom in March and April.

The call was made in a joint statement signed by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and 32 Vietnamese faith-based organizations, international human rights NGOs and individuals. According to the statement, on March 31 local authorities in Gia Lai Province used violence to prevent Tran Thi Hong from attending a meeting with the U.S. Ambassador At Large on International Religious Freedom, David Saperstein. The meeting was relocated to Hong's home and was observed by the local authorities.

On April 14, Hong alleged she was abducted from her home and taken to a local People's Committee office where plainclothes agents beat her severely for three hours while they interrogated her about the meeting with Ambassador Saperstein. As a result of the beating, Hong suffered injuries to her head, knees, legs, hands, and feet.

Hong is a member of the Vietnamese Women for Human Rights, a civil society organization which aims to raise awareness of human rights and human dignity, with a particular emphasis on the rights on women.

She is married to Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, also an activist, who is currently serving an 11-year prison sentence. Pastor Chinh advocated for religious freedom and democracy in Vietnam and established a fellowship which provided assistance to ethnic minorities and the families of prisoners of conscience. In 2012, he was convicted of "undermining national unity" under Article 87 of the Criminal Code.

In an interview with Radio Free Asia, Ambassador Saperstein confirmed that the authorities had blocked Hong's access to the hotel where the meeting on March 31 was to take place.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We fully support this statement calling on Vietnam's government to investigate allegations of torture of Tran Thi Hong. CSW continues to receive reports of harassment, intimidation and violence against religious communities not registered with the authorities; we further note various violations against bloggers, religious leaders, lawyers and activists seeking to promote human rights in Vietnam. We call on the government to investigate these deeply concerning reports of violence against Tran Thi Hong, and to release Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh and other prisoners detained for defending the freedom of religion or belief and other human rights."