

Viet Khang, Songwriter with a Conscience
Jailed for expressing his patriotic feelings



Viet Khang, a songwriter currently detained by the public security police without charges, has quickly become the symbol and voice of conscience of the post-war generation of Vietnamese. His arrest has prompted a movement among Vietnamese artists and intellectuals in Vietnam and overseas calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Born into a poor family in 1978 as Vo Minh Tri, he grew up and lives in My Tho, Tien Giang with his wife and their four-year old son. He discovered his love for music from an early age and has made a living as a songwriter under the pen name “Minh Tri”. He is also a drummer performing with several local bands. He operates a small recording studio to provide for his family’s livelihood.

As he toured many cities to perform, he increasingly noticed rampant social injustices and widening poverty that affect his people and threaten his country’s future. Disturbed, he shared his feelings and thoughts with other like-minded young Vietnamese. In April 2011 they founded “Patriotic Youth,” a loose network of college students, young professionals and young artists, to promote public consciousness about social justice and civic engagement. Some members created blogs and websites to advocate for the respect of human rights, freedom, and free elections. Others passed out fliers calling for democratic reforms and the defense of Vietnam’s sovereignty against China’s expansionism. Under the new pen name of “Viet Khang,” Vo Minh Tri wrote two songs that spread virally through the internet.

His song “Who are you?” questions the conscience of public security police members who brutally assaulted, arrested and detained demonstrators for peacefully expressing concern over China’s territorial ambitions. In “Where is my Viet Nam?”, Viet Khang confesses disillusionment with a regime that pays little attention to the spreading social injustices, decries

the leadership's lack of resolve to defend the country's sovereignty, and calls on citizens to assume responsibility for Vietnam's future. He personally performed both songs and posted them on the internet.

Soon after their posting, on September 16, 2011 the police arrested Viet Khang and two other members of Patriotic Youth. The police confiscated Viet Khang's computer and all equipment at his recording studio. He was released and then re-arrested on December 23, 2011. On October 30, 2012 he was sentenced to four years of imprisonment followed by three years of house arrest.

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U.S. Department of State's statement on the sentencing of Viet Khang and his fellow musician Tran Vu Anh Binh: "This is the latest in a series of detentions and convictions in Vietnam against those seeking nothing more than the peaceful expression of their views. This latest example of the Vietnamese authorities restricting freedom of expression is inconsistent with international standards. Given the recent worsening of the human rights situation in Vietnam, we urge the Vietnamese government to acknowledge and remedy this situation, including through the release of these musicians, and all prisoners of conscience, as well as adherence to its international obligations immediately." November 1, 2012

Act Now:

Please help free Viet Khang, a songwriter with a conscience, by passing on this appeal for his immediate and unconditional release to elected officials, the media, human rights organizations, associations of artists and musicians, college students and all those who care.