

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200 / Wetstraat 200
1040 Bruxelles, Belgium

Copy to:

Ms. Kaja Kallas, Vice President of the European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Mr. Maroš Šefčovič, Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security

15 April 2026

Re: Concerns regarding the EU-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and Commitments to Human Rights and a Just Energy Transition

Dear President von der Leyen,

We, the undersigned organizations, are members and supporters of the Vietnam Climate Defenders Coalition - a group of international and regional human rights, environmental and climate justice organizations concerned about threats to civic space and environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) in the context of Vietnam's energy transition. We write regarding the upgrade of EU-Vietnam relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, as set out in the [Joint Statement](#) concluded in Hanoi on 29 January 2026. While we welcome the elevated relationship, we are deeply concerned that it must be anchored in meaningful progress on human rights, climate action, and a just energy transition.

We positively note that the Joint Statement reaffirms commitments to trade and sustainable development, just energy transition, and human rights dialogue - including the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and its Chapter 13 trade and sustainable development (TSD) commitments, the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), and human rights and rule of law cooperation under the EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Meeting these commitments requires robust civic space, full and meaningful public participation, and rigorous human-rights due diligence by financial partners and investors.

However, these conditions are not met in Vietnam - and are, in fact, deteriorating. We note with serious concern that the upgrade comes at a time of increased crackdowns on civic space in Vietnam, human rights violations targeting individuals exercising fundamental freedoms of association and expression, the systematic and arbitrary imprisonment of environmental human rights defenders advocating for a just energy transition, and forced closures and operational restrictions for civil society organizations working on environmental, labor and sustainable development issues.

The EU Domestic Advisory Group under the EVFTA has in statements [repeatedly expressed](#) its deep concern about this situation, and a formal complaint asserting EVFTA violations in this regard [was filed](#) with the EU Commission in February 2025. These conditions undermine the transparency, participation, and trust on which these partnerships depend.

The EU is one of Vietnam's largest trading and economic partners, providing millions in investment and development cooperation, including in the renewable energy sector. In 2025 alone, trade between Vietnam and the EU was estimated to have reached more than [55,9 billion Euro](#) in the first eight months and is projected to increase in the coming years. The EU's upgraded relationship with Vietnam, its position as a leading member of the Vietnam JETP International Partners Group (IPG), and its leadership in labour, energy and climate cooperation carry critical influence and the responsibility to ensure accountability frameworks on environmental protection, labour and human rights.

We remain extremely concerned that the upgraded Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and expanded cooperation, including financial and technical support for the JETP, have proceeded without publicly available, binding human-rights safeguards or clarity on human-rights due diligence requirements by EU partners, financiers or implementing agencies. The shrinking civic space and use of vague laws to criminalise EHRDs and other civil society actors in Vietnam critically undermines the transparency, participation and accountability that are central to this strategic partnership. While we appreciate the EU's ongoing engagement on human-rights issues in Vietnam, the elevation of bilateral relations underscores the need for stronger, explicit and operational human-rights benchmarks and safeguards in EU-Vietnam cooperation.

In light of the above, we respectfully call on the European Commission to:

- Publicly call for the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrarily detained environmental human rights defenders in Vietnam;
- Require binding human rights safeguards and due diligence frameworks in ongoing JETP financial and technical support;
- Conduct a formal human rights impact assessment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and its implications for civic space and EHRDs;
- Ensure full and meaningful participation of independent civil society, including environmental human rights defenders, in the implementation and monitoring of all EU-Vietnam agreements.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International
 Asia Human Rights and Labour Advocates
 Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on Extractive Industries and Energy (AIPNEE)
 Asia Pacific Network of Environmental Defenders
 Center for Energy, Ecology and Development
 EarthRights International
 Energy Shift Southeast Asia
 GegenStrömung
 Global Witness
 groundWork, Friends of the Earth, South Africa
 International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory
 for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
 International Rivers
 KRuHA - people's coalition for the right to water
 Mekong Watch
 Manushya Foundation
 Powershift
 World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for
 the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

