

Statement of Pham Doan Trang during her Trial and Sentencing, December 14, 2021

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, once made a general statement: imagine a world of six billion people in which everyone followed the same religion; what would happen? It is certain that sooner or later, a group would decide that the religion was no longer useful to them. This group would splinter away to form a new religion or otherwise follow no religion at all.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama stated this fact to point out that this world, this life is at its root, pluralistic, that humanity tends toward pluralism. Only the foolish would argue the fact of pluralism or deny its existence. Only the heinous would try to extinguish it. And only extremely foolish and heinous governments would try to extinguish it through repression and the imprisonment of dissidents, writers, journalists, social critics, and democracy and human rights activists.

In a democratic society, if a citizen writes something or responds to interview questions from foreign journalists regarding matters the government doesn't want to hear, what would be the civilized response? The most civilized response would be for the government to do nothing because a civilized person knows how to respect the opinions and interests of others. In a less fortunate situation, if a government has authoritarian tendencies and finds what the citizen says unacceptable, then it could simply write books or articles to rebut that citizen, or even boldly reach out to the foreign press to arrange an interview in which a government representative expresses his/her viewpoint or responds to the citizen in-kind. But the Socialist Republic of Vietnam does none of this. Instead, it chooses to respond in a more vile, foolish, and heinous manner, imprisoning its citizens simply because they write works or respond to interviews with foreign journalists.

Today, brothers and sisters, you sentence me, perhaps to many years in prison, but that's all right. As the figure Nguyen Trai states in the tragedy "The Secret of Le Chi Garden": "An animal can maul a human to death, but it is still an animal. Humanity carries within itself the ability to reason and may even be killed over it, but the protection of reason is forever the sacred duty of humanity."

The longer the prison sentence, the more demonstrable the authoritarian, undemocratic, and anti-democratic nature of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Brothers and sisters, you may imprison me and bask in celebration for eliminating a longstanding thorn in your eye, but you will never be rid of your ugly, authoritarian, undemocratic, anti-democratic reputation. Because an animal is forever an animal; it can never become human.