**Vietnam Police Regularly Abuse Detainees: Rights Group**

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http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-09-16/vietnam-police-use-torture-to-extract-confessions-hrw-says

Vietnamese police abuse and sometimes torture people in custody for crimes as minor as traffic violations and are rarely disciplined for a practice that has lead to deaths of detainees, Human Rights Watch said.

Allegations of police abuse were found in 44 of Vietnam’s 58 provinces and in each of the country’s five largest cities in a four-year period through July 2014, according to a [report](http://www.hrw.org/asia/vietnam), “Public Insecurity: Deaths in Custody and Police Brutality in Vietnam,” released by the group today.

Vietnamese police act more like a political agency to safeguard the Communist Party’s hold on power than a professional force for public safety, the report said. Vietnam lacks a strong legal culture, has relatively few checks-and-balances on those in power and has a state-controlled media that is discouraged from investigative journalism, the report said.

“What we have uncovered is a human rights crisis in the daily operations of the Vietnam police,” Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said at a press conference to present the report in Bangkok. “We’re convinced what we are seeing today is the tip of a much larger iceberg.”

Vietnam rejects the “erroneous” claims made in the Human Rights Watch report, foreign ministry deputy spokeswoman Tran Thi Bich Van said in a statement. Vietnam, which signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture, will “fiercely” punish anyone who mistreats or tortures those being investigated and on trial, she said.

**‘Ordinary People’**

Human Rights Watch didn’t receive any reply to letters sent to the government seeking a response to the report, Robertson said.

Unlike the elite security forces who are normally involved in detaining political dissidents, the local police responsible for many of the abuses in the report often receive little or no training, Robertson said.

“We are revealing what is essentially a hidden human rights crisis affecting the ordinary people of Vietnam,” he said. “This is a report about farmers and businessmen and local merchants and students and others who ended up in police custody for activities that you and I would not consider to be out of the ordinary.”

The cases of abuse documented in the report were compiled from news reports, social media and independent blogs and then cross-checked.

**Training, Legal Counsel**

Vietnam’s government needs to provide better police training, install cameras in interrogation and detention facilities, provide legal counsel for those detained and allow local media to freely report on police activities, Human Rights Watch said. The government also needs to establish an independent police commission to review complaints, it said.

“Until police get a loud and clear message from the top levels of government that abuse won’t be tolerated, there will be no security for ordinary people who fall into police hands,” Robertson said.

Vietnam’s human rights violations include “continued police mistreatment of suspects during arrest and detention, including the use of lethal force as well as austere prison conditions,” the U.S. State Department said in its 2013 Vietnam [human rights report](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220456.pdf).

Allegations of police abuse and corruption are increasingly being discussed in Vietnam, including at the National Assembly, said Carlyle Thayer, an emeritus professor at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra. Stories about police being punished for abuse are starting to be reported in the local media, he said.

“In the Vietnam system, there is a pervasive condition of physical violence against opponents,” Thayer said in a phone interview. “It’s becoming more center stage in the political dialogue. This reflects a sea change in societal views.”