

International Monitor Formosa Alliance

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Website: <https://disaster-sts-network.org/content/international-monitoring-formosa-alliance-imfa/essay>

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Dear Mr. President,

Considering your upcoming visit to Vietnam, we wish to inform you of the challenging circumstances faced by victims of the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel environmental catastrophe. In 2016, the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel plant in Central Vietnam released toxic chemicals into the sea, leading to extensive marine life casualties, severely impacting over 100,000 fishermen's livelihoods and causing devastation to over four million residents in four provinces. Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, a subsidiary of the Formosa Plastics Group, belatedly admitted responsibility for Vietnam's most severe environmental disaster.

While Formosa Plastics agreed to provide USD 500 million in compensation, the payment was directed to the Vietnamese government and the victims have not yet received restitution. When the fishermen pursued legal action against Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation in Vietnam, their cases were dismissed, and many appellants were arrested for prolonged periods with brutal treatment. Over twenty victims are still in prison. Numerous individuals, including journalists and bloggers, have been detained and incarcerated because of expressing concerns for the victims, while some are still in hiding as the Vietnamese government continues to pursue them.

Supported by overseas Vietnamese organizations and N.G.O.s in Taiwan and the United States, 7,874 victims filed suit against Formosa Plastics Group in Taiwan in June 2019. Due to the issue of extraterritorial jurisdiction, the lawsuit against Formosa was initially rejected at both the District and High Courts, but ultimately acknowledged by the Supreme Court on October 18, 2020. Unfortunately, the court excluded eleven defendants affiliated with Formosa Plastics Group's U.S. conglomerate, stating that they were foreign entities over which Taiwan held no jurisdiction. The legal process is ongoing.

Meanwhile, many of the fishermen sought employment in distant provinces or mortgaged their homes to secure jobs in neighboring countries, often enduring perilous journeys. The tragic deaths of 39 Vietnamese individuals found in a shipping container at the British border in 2019 is an example – 35 hailed from the regions affected by the Formosa disaster. Not to be excluded in the tragedy are the children who are separated from their parents. Numerous children have had to abandon their education due to their parent's inability to afford tuition fees.

Formosa Plastics has garnered a horrendous reputation for consistently flouting environmental regulations and putting workers and communities at risk around the world, including in Illinois, Texas and Louisiana. The company has left ecological destruction in its wake while using its considerable financial influence and political connections to manipulate governments and environmental agencies. Formosa has sidestepped ecological laws with impunity and without effect.

We call on you to engage in diplomacy with the Vietnamese government – which continues to deny the ongoing injustices – ensuring they comply with the International Human Rights Law under the United Nations, of which they are a member. As the President of the United States of America, your support is indispensable in pursuing justice by advocating for:

- 1) Equitable and fair compensation for the victims.
- 2) An independent inquiry to confirm the cessation of pollution, cleanup of the impacted environment, and restoration of the livelihoods and communities of those affected by this tragedy.
- 3) The immediate release of all political prisoners associated with this cause.

Signed on behalf of IMFA,

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