Vaclav Havel Center

Bohemian National Hall
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Vaclav Havel Center Announces Pham Doan Trang as Winner of 2026 Disturbing the Peace Award

10th anniversary of the award honors a Vietnamese writer, journalist, publisher, and advocate for democratic freedoms and human rights

NEW YORK - September 2026 - The Vaclav Havel Center (VHC) announces Pham Doan Trang as the 2026 recipient of the Disturbing the Peace Award to a Courageous Writer at Risk, marking the 10th anniversary of an award dedicated to writers who defend human rights and freedom of expression despite persecution.

Pham Doan Trang is a Vietnamese author, journalist, publisher, and democracy activist currently serving a nine-year prison sentence in Vietnam following her 2021 conviction for "conducting propaganda against the State." Through her writing and advocacy, she has continued to defend freedom of expression and human rights despite years of harassment, persecution, and imprisonment. In honoring Trang, the Vaclav Havel Center recognizes her courage and the enduring power of the written word to challenge repression and defend human dignity.

A Decade of Disturbing the Peace
Established in 2016, the annual Disturbing the Peace Award to a Courageous Writer at Risk honors writers who, like Václav Havel, demonstrate a passionate commitment to human rights and have faced persecution for their beliefs. The award recognizes exceptional courage in dissent and artistic integrity, includes a $5,000 cash prize, and helps bring international attention to writers whose freedom is at risk because of their work.

For ten years, the award has served as both recognition and protection: amplifying voices that others have sought to silence and reminding the public of the essential role writers play in challenging injustice, defending human dignity, and preserving the freedom to think and speak openly. On its 10th anniversary, that mission remains as urgent as ever.

Nominations are submitted each year by human rights and literary organizations worldwide. A shortlist is reviewed by the VHC Award Committee and evaluated by a distinguished international jury of writers, scholars, advocates, and former awardees.

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Salil Tripathi, former Chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee, current board member of PEN International, and a member of the 2026 Disturbing the Peace Award jury, added:
"The brave Vietnamese writer and human rights defender Pham Doan Trang writes with the clarity of someone who has always known that silence is not an option. She has paid for that clarity with her freedom, and still her words carry further than the walls meant to contain them. Vaclav Havel understood that the dissident's power lies not in force but in refusal - the simple, stubborn act of naming things as they are. Pham Doan Trang has lived that refusal, word by word, essay by essay, arrest by arrest, and in doing so has shown what it means to disturb the peace of the powerful."

John Shattuck, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor from 1993 to 1998 and U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic from 1998 to 2000, commented:
"Pham Doan Trang uses plain-spoken eloquence to describe the suppression of freedom. She has suffered the unjust consequences of speaking truth to power. Her life and her writings are a shining example of Vaclav Havel's Power of the Powerless, in which he proclaims that '[t]ruth does not operate politically because it commands obedience, but because it awakens recognition.' Havel celebrates the moral power of dissent in words that succinctly express why Pham Doan Trang has been chosen to receive the 2026 Disturbing the Peace Award: 'The dissident articulates [her] dignity as a citizen, regardless of the cost.'"

Maksim Znak, Belarusian lawyer and writer and recipient of the 2025 Disturbing the Peace Award, commented:
"Pham Doan Trang confirmed the message of her writing by her actions: she proved ready to sacrifice everything she had for the sake of her ideals, understanding the risks and calmly asking to use the threats to the benefit of her mission. That is the real power of a prominent writer, and that is what living in truth actually means."

About Pham Doan Trang
Pham Doan Trang is a Vietnamese author, journalist, publisher, and democracy activist. Her books include Chính trị bình dân (Popular Politics, 2018), Cẩm nang nuôi tù (Handbook on Supporting Prisoners, 2019), and Phản kháng phi bạo lực (Non-Violent Opposition, 2019). She was arrested in October 2020 and sentenced in December 2021 to nine years in prison under Vietnam's anti-state propaganda law. She remains imprisoned in 2026.

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Award History
Past recipients of the Disturbing the Peace Award include:

- Maksim Znak (2025)
- Arundhati Roy and Toomaj Salehi (2024)
- Alaa Abd El-Fattah (2023)
- Andrey Kurkov (2022)
- Dmitri Strotsev (2021)
- Angel Santiesteban Prats (2020)
- Aslı Erdoğan (2019)
- Liao Yiwu (2018)
- Burhan Sönmez (2017)
- Ma Thida (2016)

The 2026 Disturbing the Peace Award Jury was composed of:
Salil Tripathi, former Chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee and current board member of PEN International
Maksim Znak, lawyer, writer, academic, and 2025 Disturbing the Peace Award laureate
Jessica Ní Mhainín, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Index on Censorship
Barbora Bukovská, Senior Director for Law and Policy at ARTICLE 19
John Shattuck, US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 1993-98 & US Ambassador to the Czech Republic, 1998-2001

About the Vaclav Havel Center
The Vaclav Havel Center preserves and advances the legacy of Václav Havel by creating a space for dialogue, artistic expression, and the defense of human rights and democratic values. Through public programs, theater, literature, awards, and international partnerships, the Center connects Havel's ideas with contemporary voices confronting the challenges of freedom, responsibility, and human dignity.

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