

In a first, Vietnam admits government accountability in Dak Lak attacks

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Land disputes and a growing wealth gap are partly to blame, official says.

State mismanagement was among the causes of deadly attacks on government facilities in Vietnam's Dak Lak province, a top security minister said, in the first official acknowledgement that reasons other than "incitement" by hostile forces were to blame for the incident.

The admission of government accountability by a senior official for the June 11 incident – in which two groups of about 40 people armed with guns and knives attacked the headquarters of the southern communes of Ea Tieu and Ea Ktur – is rare in Vietnam, where criticism of the one-party state is not tolerated.

Nine people were killed in the attacks, including four policemen, two commune officials and three villagers. Authorities have since detained nearly 100 ethnic minority Montagnards for allegedly participating in what have been labeled an act of terrorism.

On Wednesday, Vice Minister of Public Security Tran Quoc To called the incident "unfortunate," according to a report by the official Tien Phong (Pioneer) newspaper, and acknowledged that frustration over Vietnam's growing wealth gap and poor land management by local officials were partly to blame.

However, the vice minister, who is also the brother of late President Tran Dai Quang, stressed that "negligence was not the only issue at play" and told the National Assembly Committee reviewing an investigation of the attacks that they were an "inevitable consequence of relentless opposition and sabotage" of the government.

The Vietnamese government and state media often refer to peaceful critics of state policies and those who call for greater protections of human rights as "hostile forces" – particularly overseas Vietnamese activists.

A persecuted people

The attacks occurred in an area that is home to about 30 indigenous tribes known collectively as Montagnards, who have historically felt persecuted or oppressed.

The term "Montagnard" was first used by the French during colonial times to refer to indigenous people living in Vietnam's mountainous areas but it is not used inside Vietnam these days.

In late June, RFA [interviewed](#) several overseas Montagnard organizations whose members denied involvement in the incident and condemned the violent attacks.

Last month, almost one year after the Vietnamese government received a United Nations

[communication](#) regarding rights violations toward the Montagnards, Hanoi issued a [letter of reply](#) saying the ethnic group does not exist.

New York-based Human Rights Watch says the Montagnards are subjected to violations of freedom of religion and belief, and has accused the Vietnamese government of being “in total denial mode,” rejecting allegations of rights violations and restricting access to the Central Highlands “to deny independent observers the opportunity to investigate.”

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