

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 41/006/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 225
30 August 2006

Viet Nam: Cyber dissident released from prison into house arrest

Prisoner of conscience Dr Pham Hong Son was today released from jail as part of an amnesty to mark Vietnam's National Day on 2 September. He will remain under house arrest for up to three years.

"While it is good news for Dr Pham Hong Sen to be released from jail, he now faces three years under house arrest and we still consider him a prisoner of conscience," said Janice Beanland, South East Asia Campaigner at Amnesty International.

"The Vietnamese government has been cracking down on cyber dissidents for the last four years, detaining people who email or post on the internet material that is critical of the government. There are many others still detained and the government continues to silence critics in this way."

On 18 August 25-year-old Truong Quoc Huy was arrested by plain clothes police as he was connecting to a democracy chat room in an internet cafe in Ho Chi Minh City. He had only been out of incommunicado detention for six weeks, having previously been arrested last October for participating in an internet chat room. Another cyber dissident, Nguyen Vu Binh, is still serving a seven-year sentence for passing information through the internet to overseas Vietnamese groups.

"We urge the government to release Dr Pham Hong Son from house arrest and to free all those imprisoned simply for expressing their peaceful opinions," said Janice Beanland.

Dr Pham Hong Son, a businessman and qualified medical doctor, was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment and three years house arrest on charges of "spying", having been arrested in March 2002. Shortly before his arrest, he had translated into Vietnamese an article from the United States embassy website about democracy. In an unprecedented development in August 2003 his sentence was reduced to five years' imprisonment, possibly because of the intense international pressure about his case.

Amnesty International's international campaign against internet repression can be found at <http://irrepressible.info>.

Public Document

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