

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

## News Flash

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### **Viet Nam: Internet activist priest imprisoned**

Father Nguyen Van Ly, a 60-year-old Catholic priest who helped set up an internet petition calling for democratic change, was today sentenced to eight years imprisonment for "conducting propaganda" against the state.

Four of his associates, Nguyen Phong, Nguyen Binh Thanh, Hoang Thi Anh Dao and Le Thi Hang, were also sentenced.

In response, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia Pacific Director Tim Parritt said:

"The politically-motivated charges against Father Ly and his associates are a blatant attempt to silence them and to scare off other critics of the government."

"This sentence means Father Ly will be a prisoner of conscience for the fourth time in two decades. It is indicative of a broader crackdown on dissent by the Vietnamese authorities that has been intensifying since the country held the APEC meeting last November."

"Father Ly and his associates are the first people who have been brought to trial during the crackdown -- we fear others will follow."

"The Vietnamese authorities must immediately release Father Ly, Nguyen Phong, and the three others and stop harassing and arresting those who speak out against the government."

#### **Background**

Father Ly has already spent around 15 years in prison for peacefully criticizing government policies on religion and advocating for greater respect for human rights since the late 1970's.

He is a founding member of Bloc 8406, which in April 2006 launched an on-line petition signed by 118 democracy activists calling for peaceful political change and respect for human rights in Viet Nam. The petition quickly attracted more signatories and its launch marked the effective creation of an internet based pro-democracy movement.

Since the holding of the international Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Ha Noi in November 2006, the response of the Vietnamese authorities has been to gradually intensify a crackdown on dissent by arresting and harassing dissidents. Those connected to Bloc 8406 have been targeted, along with people linked to pro-democracy political parties and publications that have emerged during the last 12 months.

Public Document

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