

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Viet Nam: Internet dissident Nguyen Vu Binh released

Amnesty International welcomes the news that Internet dissident Nguyen Vu Binh has been released from Ba Sao prison after spending almost five years behind bars.

According to official media, Nguyen Vu Binh, 39, was granted an amnesty by President Nguyen Minh Triet on 8 June 2007 after having sent a letter to the head of state "pleading for clemency".

Journalist and writer Nguyen Vu Binh had served over two-thirds of his seven year prison sentence when he was released. According to media reports, he left the prison in the afternoon on 9 June to reunite with his wife and two daughters in their Ha Noi home.

Amnesty International has considered Nguyen Vu Binh a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of his opinions. The organisation has campaigned extensively for his release.

He was arrested in September 2002, charged under national security legislation and convicted for "spying", article 80 of the Penal Code, for having written and posted articles about democracy on the Internet and being in email contact with political groups in exile.

In addition to the seven years imprisonment, Nguyen Vu Binh was also sentenced to a three year probation period following his release from prison. It remains unclear whether he is currently under such probation or whether he is a free man. Amnesty International is calling for no such restrictions to be imposed on him.

Amnesty International hopes that the release marks a reversal of an ongoing political crackdown in which more than 20 people, including lawyers, trade unionists, religious leaders and Internet dissidents, have been arrested, 11 of whom have been convicted in apparently politically motivated trials. The organisation calls on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those who are serving prison sentences for having exercised their right to peaceful dissent.

Background

The rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association are guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The covenant is binding on Viet Nam, which is a state party since 1982. Yet peaceful government critics have been charged with criminal offences in the penal code's Chapter XI, which relates to national security.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Vietnamese authorities to lift restrictions on fundamental freedoms, release all prisoners of conscience, and end the criminalization of peaceful dissent.