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Viet Nam: Lawyer latest victim of government's crackdown on dissent

Viet Nam must immediately release a prominent lawyer and human rights activist who was jailed on politically motivated charges today, Amnesty International said.

A court in Viet Nam's capital Ha Noi today sentenced Le Quoc Quan, one of the country's best known dissidents, to 30 months in prison on trumped up tax evasion charges.

"This is a ludicrous sentence, and just another clear example of the Vietnamese authorities harassing and imprisoning those who are peaceful critics with opposing views," said Isabelle Arradon, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia Pacific Director.

"It is very difficult to not conclude that Le Quoc Quan has simply been targeted for his human rights activism – as he has been many times before. He should be released immediately and all charges against him dropped."

Le Quoc Quan has been a prominent campaigner for democracy and human rights issues in Viet Nam for years. He wrote a popular blog exposing corruption and human rights abuses not covered by the state-controlled media.

He has been a frequent target of harassment by the authorities, and has been arrested several times before. Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience in 2007 when he was detained for three months for supposed anti-government activities.

The Vietnamese authorities impose tight restrictions on freedom of expression and have, over the past years, intensified a crackdown on critics instead of ensuring that there is space for peaceful activists and human rights defenders to express their views.

"The Vietnamese government's attempts to stifle freedom of expression and independent voices are very worrying, and have to end immediately. Over the past two years dozens of activists have been handed harsh prison sentences for doing nothing but expressing their opinions peacefully," said Arradon.

In September 2012 three bloggers were handed long prison terms for "spreading anti-state propaganda", one of whom (Nguyen Van Hai) was first imprisoned on trumped up tax evasion charges like Le Quoc Quan.