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Viet Nam: Prisoner of conscience amnesties - a positive step

Amnesty International today welcomed the announcement from the Vietnamese authorities that two prominent prisoners of conscience will be included in the annual Presidential Amnesty for National Day on 2 September.

“This is a great day for the families of Dr Nguyen Dan Que and Professor Doan Viet Hoat,” the human rights organization said today. “Amnesty International members around the world who have campaigned for years for the release of these prisoners will all share the families feelings of great happiness at their impending release.”

The two prisoners of conscience have both spent many years in prison for their peaceful activities and political beliefs. Both have suffered serious health problems in recent years.

Dr Nguyen Dan Que is an endocrinologist who was arrested in 1990 and sentenced in 1991 to 20 years’ imprisonment. He was a founder member of the *Cao Trao Nhan Ban* (High Tide of Humanism Movement), and wrote the organization’s manifesto which called for democratic change in Viet Nam.

Dr Nguyen Dan Que was previously detained without trial for 10 years between 1978 and 1988, after he criticised the national health care policy of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. On his release from prison, he became a member of Amnesty International. When he was re-arrested in 1990, one of the charges against him was his membership of the organization.

Professor Doan Viet Hoat is a writer and academic, and a leading member of the Freedom Forum group, which produced a small newsletter critical of the Vietnamese Government. He was arrested in 1990, and sentenced in 1993 to 20 years’ imprisonment, reduced on appeal to 15 years, for “counter-revolutionary activities.” He had previously been detained without trial for 12 years between 1976 and 1988. Professor Hoat was held in solitary confinement for much of his most recent imprisonment.

“The release of Nguyen Dan Que and Doan Viet Hoat is a cause for celebration, and we welcome the Vietnamese Government’s decision to give these men their freedom,” Amnesty International said. “We are hopeful that this is a turning point for human rights in Viet Nam, and invite the Vietnamese authorities to open a dialogue with independent human rights monitors, in order to help bring an end to the detention of prisoners of conscience in the country.”
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