

EXTERNAL

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MEDICAL CONCERN

Nguyen Chi Thien
VIET NAM

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the well-being of Nguyen Chi Thien, aged 58, an adopted prisoner of conscience who has spent the majority of the last 32 years in detention and whose conditions of imprisonment have led to a marked deterioration in his health. Nguyen Chi Thien is a poet and a graduate from the Ha Noi Faculty of Letters. He was first arrested in 1958 at the age of 26 after seeking official approval for a literary magazine he had started with other young writers. He was accused of "trying ... to discredit the regime by writing romantic poetry" and sentenced to two years' hard labour. He was not released, however, until 1964 and was re-arrested the following year and interned in a "re-education" camp until his release 14 years later in 1978. In April 1979 Nguyen Chi Thien was again arrested after taking a collection of prison poems to the British Embassy and seeking its publication. He was arrested immediately upon leaving the Embassy and has been imprisoned since then without any form of trial.

It is not known whether Nguyen Chi Thien was arrested under provisions of the Vietnamese Penal Code or whether he was detained under special regulations which permit the detention without charge or trial in "re-education" camps of individuals termed "obstinate counter-revolutionary elements who have committed acts detrimental to general security" and "professional hooligan elements".

Nguyen Chi Thien's poetry, much of which reflects his opposition to the government and is strongly critical of communist government in Viet Nam, has been translated into French and English. Two volumes, relating the experiences of his long imprisonment, have been published outside Viet Nam - "Songs from Prison", published in Paris, and "Flowers from Hell" which was published in the USA in 1979. In 1985 he was awarded the Rotterdam International Poetry Prize.

Since his arrest in 1979, Nguyen Chi Thien has been moved to various detention centres and currently is believed to be in Ba Sao camp in Ha Nam Ninh province, about 70 kilometres south of Ha Noi. He is reported to be kept in strict isolation with no possibility of communicating with other prisoners. Amnesty International regards such conditions in themselves as amounting to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Nguyen Chi Thien is reported to be in very poor health, suffering from tuberculosis, arthritis and kidney and liver problems. He is said to have great difficulty in walking, to be very thin and to have failing eyesight. His general state of health appears to be deteriorating progressively and from the information available it is feared that he has no access to regular medical attention. The prison authorities are reported to provide him with very little food or clothing and the conditions in which he is held fall far short of complying with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Amnesty International has adopted Nguyen Chi Thien as a prisoner of conscience, believing him to be detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, and is urging the Vietnamese authorities to ensure his immediate and unconditional release.

Below are extracts from some of his poems written in prison:

"In days of old, Li Po raised up his head
To wonder at the moon
Then bowing his head low,
He longed for his homeland

Today I raise up my head
To count cobwebs on the wall
Then bowing my head low
I crush rice, and pick up
One by One
The scattered grains of rice

In days of old Li Po
Revelled day and night in wine
And careless,
His feet rested on the Emperor's belly
Today I writhe in hunger
And my feet
Chafed by chains
Like the color of my rusting country
Viet Nam

Li Po lived in the Dark Ages
In feudal times, there was no freedom then!
I live in Communist plenty
Where happiness overflows
A Paradise on Earth
Poor Li Po - how fortunate I am
Poor Li Po - how fortunate I am"

.....

"My poetry's not mere poetry, no,
but it's the sound of sobbing from a life,
the din of doors in a dark jail,
the wheeze of two poor wasted lungs,
the thud of earth tossed down to bury dreams,
the clank of hoes that dig up memories,
the clash of teeth all chattering from cold,
the cry of hunger from a stomach wrenching wild,
the throb-throb of a heart that grieves, forlorn,
the helpless voice before so many wrecks.
All sounds of life half lived,
of death half died - no poetry, no."

Nguyen Chi Thien

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To: Medical professionals
 From: Medical Office / Research Department - Asia
 Date: 29 November 1990

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

Nguyen Chi Thien
 VIET NAM

Keywords

Theme: POC/ill-health/detention without trial

Summary

Letters are requested on behalf of Nguyen Chi Thien, an adopted prisoner of conscience, who has been detained for much of the past 32 years for the expression of his opposition to the system of government in Viet Nam. He is reported to be held in isolation in very harsh conditions and to be in very fragile health. Since his last arrest in 1979 he has not been brought to trial. Amnesty International is seeking his prompt and unconditional release from prison.

Letters are requested to the addresses given below

- . expressing concern about the health of Nguyen Chi Thien, urging that his isolation is immediately ended and that he is given access to any medical attention he requires
- . urging his prompt release from detention on the grounds that the sole reason for his arrest appears to have been his non-violent expression of opinion in the form of written poetry

ADDRESSES

Mr Mai Chi Tho
 Minister of the Interior
 16 Tran Binh Trong Street
 Ha Noi
 Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Mr Phan Hien
 Minister of Justice
 5 Ong Ich Khiem Street
 Ha Noi
 Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Mr Pham Song
 Minister of Public Health
 138A Giang Vo Street
 Ha Noi
 Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

