

AI Index: PRE 01/185/2011
05 April 2011

Prominent Vietnamese activist jailed over democracy calls

Viet Nam must release a high-profile activist sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for calling for an end to one-party rule, Amnesty International said today.

Human rights defender and environmental activist Cu Huy Ha Vu was convicted of "conducting propaganda against the state" by a court in Ha Noi yesterday after calling for a multiparty system in online articles and for giving interviews to foreign media.

Vu was also sentenced to three years of house arrest upon the completion of his seven year prison term.

"This was a sham trial, with the presumption of innocence and right to a defence completely ignored," said Donna Guest, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Deputy Director. "Cu Huy Va Vu is a prisoner of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released."

The son of a famous revolutionary colleague of the late President Ho Chi Minh, Vu had previously twice sued the Prime Minister of the country, once in an attempt to stop a controversial bauxite mining project from harming the environment, and the other challenging the legality of a decree banning class-action petitions.

His was the second major trial of a dissident this year, following the January conviction of Vi Duc Hoi, a pro-democracy activist and former Communist Party official prosecuted for posting articles online calling for democracy.

Two former prisoners of conscience who tried to observe his trial, Pham Hong Son and Le Quoc Quan, were reportedly arrested outside the court. Amnesty International is also calling for their immediate release.

"The Vietnamese authorities have outlawed any peaceful dissent through their misuse of the judicial system. The government needs to heed the calls of the international community to stop persecuting and imprisoning non-violent activists," said Donna Guest.

Dozens of peaceful political critics and activists have been sentenced to long prison terms since Viet Nam began a concerted crackdown on freedom of expression in October 2009.

Amnesty International is calling on the Vietnamese government to allow judicial independence, and to repeal or reform vaguely worded security legislation used to prosecute peaceful critics.