

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Viet Nam: Prisoner of conscience must be released**

Amnesty International today expressed grave concern at the arrest of dissident and former prisoner of conscience Dr Nguyen Dan Que on 17 March.

"This is yet more evidence of the ongoing harsh crackdown on freedom of expression by the Vietnamese authorities," Amnesty International said.

By arresting Dr Nguyen Dan Que the government continues to show that it will not tolerate people peacefully exercising the most basic of rights enshrined in the Vietnamese Constitution and in international law.

"Dr Nguyen Dan Que has already spent 18 years in prison for his dissenting political opinions and advocacy of human rights. He should be released immediately," the organization emphasized.

The 60 year old doctor was reportedly arrested outside his house in Ho Chi Minh City while on his way to an Internet cafe. Security officers have reportedly removed some documents, a computer and a phone from his home.

"His health has suffered considerably because of the long time he has already spent in prison. The arrest of this well-respected academic and winner of numerous human rights awards is certain to be met with international outrage," Amnesty International stressed.

Over the last year the Vietnamese authorities have arrested several other people in a crackdown against dissidents. Others have been placed under house arrest. In November 2002 Le Chi Quang, a 32-year-old law graduate was sentenced to four years' imprisonment after distributing articles critical of the Vietnamese government by e-mail.

Nguyen Khac Toan, a 47-year-old former soldier, teacher and businessman was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in December 2002 on charges of "spying" in connection with a campaign against land confiscation by the authorities. At least six other leading dissidents are awaiting trial, including respected military historian Colonel Pham Que Duong and Professor Tran Khue who were arrested in December 2002. They were among 21 dissidents who signed a petition calling for democratic reforms.

### **Background**

An endocrinologist and former Director of the Cho-Ray Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, Dr Nguyen Dan Que was held without trial between 1978 and 1988 after criticizing the national health care policy in Viet Nam.

Following his release he founded *Cao Trao Nhan Ban* (the High Tide of Humanism Movement) which called for democratic change in Viet Nam. He was arrested again in June 1990 and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in November 1991 after being charged with "activities aimed at overthrowing the

people's government".

At that time Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience. He was released under a special amnesty in September 1998. He and his family were asked by the authorities to leave Viet Nam and resettle in the USA, but they have declined to do so.

Since then Dr Nguyen Dan Que has continued to advocate for political reform, respect for human rights and freedom of expression under difficult circumstances. He has been subjected to constant surveillance and harassment by the authorities.

Public Document

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