

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 41/07/93

Distrib: PG/SC

Date: 16 September 1993

*MEDICAL CONCERN*

**Quach Vinh Nien  
VIET NAM**

Amnesty International is concerned for Quach Vinh Nien, a political prisoner sentenced in 1980 to life imprisonment and whom AI believes may be a prisoner of conscience. He was arrested in 1978 and charged with "anti-government activities" and "disloyalty to the government", charges which appear to have stemmed from newspaper articles he had written. Quach Vinh Nien, who is in his late forties, has developed cataracts and is reported to be blind in one eye; he is held in a "re-education" camp where it appears that little medical attention is available to the prisoners.

**Background**

Quach Vinh Nien graduated from Da Lat military academy in the then South Viet Nam in 1971 and subsequently became an officer in the South Vietnamese army. Following the end of the Viet Nam war in mid-1975, thousands of members of the former government's military, police, civil service and political establishment were required to undergo "re-education", which meant detention without trial in labour camps for unspecified periods of time. Quach Vinh Nien reported for "re-education" in May 1975 and was detained until August 1976.

After being released from "re-education" in 1976 Quach Vinh Nien is reported to have become a member of a small Roman Catholic group led by a priest whose church in Qui Nhon was closed in 1975. The group had tried to print a newspaper which expressed opposition to the policies of and criticized the "lack of freedom" under the government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. However, it is believed that the newspaper was never actually distributed. Quach Vinh Nien is reported to have been arrested after police raided his house on 14 June 1978. He was detained without charge or trial until August 1980 when his case came to trial. No lawyer was available to act for him and it is reported that when people tried to speak in his defence they were silenced by the judge. He was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. Quach Vinh Nien is thought to have subsequently written a letter appealing against his sentence and to have appeared before an appeals court in October 1980, but the sentence was reportedly upheld. (The Roman Catholic priest who was the leader of the religious group, was sentenced to death, a sentence which was later commuted to life imprisonment.)

In 1990 some 700 prisoners were released in an amnesty on the occasion of the country's national day. It had been hoped that Quach Vinh Nien might benefit from the amnesty, but this did not occur and although there was a further amnesty benefitting some 100 prisoners in 1992, Quach Vinh Nien's sentence of life imprisonment stands.

Quach Vinh Nien is held in camp no. 1870 at Xuan Phuoc in Phu Khanh province in the south of the country. Prior to developing cataracts, Quach suffered from chronic arthritis, but he is still required to carry out hard labour as are all those imprisoned in the camps. Conditions in the "re-education" camps remain poor. Most camps have small dispensaries, but it is reported that qualified doctors are not regularly available. Doctors who are themselves imprisoned have sometimes been able to help other detainees, although there are difficulties in obtaining necessary medication.

Quach Vinh Nien has spent 16 of his 49 years in detention, including the one-year period of "re-education" he served immediately after the end of the Viet Nam war. He is married with three children; his family are resident in Australia.

Amnesty International believes that Quach Vinh Nien may be a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for the legitimate expression of his political and religious beliefs.

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To: Medical professionals  
From: Medical Office / Research Department - Asia  
Date: 16 September 1993

*MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION*

**Quach Vinh Nien  
VIET NAM**

**Keywords**

Theme: medical care/ ill-health

**Summary**

Quach Vinh Nien is a 49-year-old political prisoner who is serving a sentence of life imprisonment and whom Amnesty International believes may be a prisoner of conscience. He suffers from arthritis and is now reported to have developed cataracts, but is still required to undertake hard labour. Please see the details attached.

**Recommended Actions**

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses given below:

- raising the case of Quach Vinh Nien who was sentenced to life imprisonment in August 1980 (the name and location of his re-education camp should be given, together with the date of his arrest and trial)
- noting reports that he is experiencing problems with his vision as a result of cataracts and seeking assurances that he will be provided with medical attention
- expressing concern that Quach Vinh Nien was sentenced after a trial in which he had no defence counsel and seeking information on which of his activities were considered to constitute "anti-government activities"
- noting that there have been a number of amnesties in recent years, resulting in the release of prisoners from re-education camps, and urging that Quach Vinh Nien's case is re-examined; if he is imprisoned solely for peaceful political activity he should be released

**Addresses**

Bui Thien Ngo  
Minister of the Interior  
16 Tran Binh Trong Street  
Hanoi  
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Nguyen Dinh Loc  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
25A Cat Linh  
Ha Noi  
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

**Copies to:**

Nguyen Trong Nhan  
Minister of Health  
138A Giang Vo  
Ha Noi  
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

and to diplomatic representatives of Vietnam in your own country.