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VIETNAM: Jail sentence for expression of ones views is a violation of human rights

Amnesty International expressed shock at the four-year prison sentence imposed on dissident Le Chi Quang by a court in Ha Noi today following a trial which reportedly lasted only a few hours.

"This sentence demonstrates the determination of the Vietnamese authorities to stifle freedom of expression through the use of national security legislation," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International considers the 32-year-old lawyer, Le Chi Quang, a prisoner of conscience.

"Le Chi Quang is now serving a long prison term solely for the peaceful exercise of his fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association," Amnesty International stressed calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

"We are calling on the Vietnamese authorities to allow their citizens the fundamental human right to express their peaceful dissenting political views," Amnesty International added.

Le Chi Quang - who was arrested on 21 February 2002 at an internet café in Ha Noi - was accused of "offences against the State and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam" after circulating via the Internet information condemning the government's recent border agreement with China. This agreement is a sensitive issue in Viet Nam and has come under unprecedented internal criticism.

Since the beginning of the year, the Vietnamese authorities have arrested several other people in a crackdown against dissident voices. Dr Pham Hong Son, journalist Nguyen Vu Binh, former soldier Nguyen Khac Toan and Chemistry Professor Vu Ngoc Binh are currently detained for their advocacy of peaceful political reform and criticism of government policies, some of them by use of the Internet.

Other dissidents such as journalist Bui Minh Quoc and writer and scholar Professor Tran Khue have been formally placed under house arrest under administrative detention orders, whilst others face constant surveillance and harassment by the authorities.

Background

New regulations restricting access and use of the internet have heightened Amnesty

International's concerns about the current climate of repression in Viet Nam. In a recent review of Viet Nam's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which it is a State party, the United Nations Human Rights Committee strongly criticized, *inter alia*, restrictions on freedom of expression and called for Vietnamese domestic law to be brought into line with international legal standards.

Concerns were also raised regarding the independence of the judiciary, its susceptibility to political pressure, and the use of administrative detention which "provides for persons to be kept under house arrest for up to two years, without the intervention of a judge or a judicial officer".

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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