

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ASA 41/019/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 154
27 June 2003

Embargo Date: 27 June 2003 09:00 GMT

Viet Nam: The criminalization of dissent

Amnesty International has released a short report today on the case and trial of dissident Dr Pham Hong Son, who was given a 13 year prison sentence for "espionage" on 18 June 2003.

At the same time Amnesty International is making public unofficial translations of two secret Directives issued earlier this year by the Politburo of the Communist Party of Viet Nam reportedly addressed to the Executive Committee of the Vietnamese Veterans Association. These provide an insight and invaluable background information into the government crackdown, arrests and recent trials of dissidents in Vietnam, including Dr Pham Hong Son.

The first of the two Directives indicates what can only be described as a state of paranoia within the Politburo of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, with assertions that it is surrounded by enemies and that they are using "peaceful evolution" as part of an overall strategy to overthrow the present government.

The second Directive addresses the cases of Pham Que Duong, Tran Khue and Tran Dung Tien, all high-profile dissidents who, according to the directive, are currently awaiting trial on espionage charges. It is immediately apparent that there is no presumption of innocence in these cases. It is also clear that any coordinated activity critical of and in opposition to the Vietnamese Communist Party is perceived as being a threat to the state itself, despite a complete absence of reference to the use of force by the dissidents or the divulging of 'state secrets'. It should be noted that Tran Khue and other dissidents are all explicitly mentioned in the official indictment document which appears as an appendix to the report on Dr Pham Hong Son.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that in such an atmosphere grave miscarriages of justice are occurring with lengthy prison sentences being handed out to people exercising their basic and fundamental rights of expression, freedom of movement and association.

The branding of Dr Pham Hong Son and the other dissidents currently in detention as "spies" not only stifles freedom of expression through the use of loosely worded national security legislation, but also criminalizes activities which are regarded as perfectly legal under international law and in most countries of the world.

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience in Viet Nam and urges the Vietnamese authorities to respect fundamental rights enshrined in their own Constitution and international agreements ratified by Viet Nam.

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>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>