

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Viet Nam: Prisoners of conscience must be released immediately

Amnesty International today wrote to the Vietnamese government expressing its concerns about prisoners of conscience Nguyen Thi Hoa, Nguyen Vu Viet and Nguyen Truc Cuong. The three are the nephews and niece of imprisoned Catholic priest and prisoner of conscience, Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly.

Nguyen Thi Hoa and her brothers will be put on trial for infringing upon "the interests of the State" at Ho Chi Minh City People's Court at 7.30 am on 10 September 2003.

The two brothers have been held for over two years in pre-trial detention. Their sister Nguyen Thi Hoa, a single mother with four children, has been held under house arrest.

It is Amnesty International's understanding that the original charge sheet prepared by the authorities for their prosecution outlining a charge of 'espionage' against the three has been superseded by new charges. Nguyen Thi Hoa and her two brothers are now accused of 'abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, the legitimate rights and interests of organizations and/or citizens' as outlined in Article 258 (2) of the Criminal Code. This may carry a prison term of between two and seven years.

Amnesty International welcomes the fact that the most serious charges of "espionage" have been dropped. The organization is nevertheless concerned that the three still face a long prison term for their peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression. Their exercise of this right has been criminalized by the misuse of vaguely-worded provisions of the Vietnamese Criminal Code.

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Nguyen Thi Hoa, Nguyen Vu Viet and Nguyen Truc Cuong. The organization believes that the case against the three is directly related to official anger resulting from their uncle's activities, whose prison term, in turn, was recently reduced from 15 to 10 years.

Amnesty International has stated that in the unfortunate event they are not released immediately and unconditionally, the organization is requesting clarification of the case against the three siblings. The organization has also urged the authorities to ensure that any resulting trial is held in public; that the three have access to defence counsel; and that their trial adheres to international standards of fair trial which Viet Nam is bound by international treaty to respect.

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