

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Viet Nam: Dissent stifled once again**

Amnesty International expressed its outrage at the prison sentences given today to the nephews and niece of prisoner of conscience Nguyen Van Ly. The organization regards the three as prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

"These three siblings have been targeted by the Vietnamese state in what can only be described as a vindictive attempt to further punish their uncle, Father Nguyen Van Ly", Amnesty International said.

After a trial closed to diplomats and foreign journalists and lasting only three hours, Nguyen Vu Viet, 27; Nguyen Truc Cuong, 36 and their sister Nguyen Thi Hoa, 44; were sentenced to five, four and three years imprisonment respectively. Nguyen Thi Hoa is a widow with four children aged between five and 18 years old. Her brothers have been held for over two years prior to the trial, itself a serious breach of Vietnamese criminal law procedures given the crimes the pair were eventually charged with.

"The three have been given these lengthy prison sentences for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, guaranteed in both the Vietnamese Constitution and international treaties to which Viet Nam is a party," said the organization.

They are accused of passing information regarding their uncle and the situation of religious freedom in Viet Nam generally to overseas Vietnamese groups regarded by the authorities as 'reactionary'.

"Why are the Vietnamese authorities so afraid of the opinions of its citizens who dare to express themselves? Why does it feel the need to lock-up people with peaceful dissenting views?" Amnesty International asked today.

The Catholic priest, Father Nguyen Van Ly, was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in October 2001 for consistently calling for more religious freedom and his long-standing criticism of the human rights policies of the Vietnamese government. The sentence was recently reduced to 10 years following an international outcry over his case.

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