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Viet Nam must release jailed blogger facing 'propaganda' trial

The Vietnamese authorities must end their persecution of a prisoner of conscience facing trial this week on politically motivated charges that could see him sentenced to a further 20 years' imprisonment, Amnesty International said today.

Blogger Nguyen Hoang Hai is due to be tried on 17 April for "conducting propaganda" against the state.

The activist, also known as Dieu Cay ("the peasant's pipe"), has been in prison since 2008, when he was convicted on trumped-up tax fraud charges.

"The persecution of Nguyen Hoang Hai is blatant and unjust. He is detained and faces trial solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression," said Donna Guest, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Programme.

"The Vietnamese authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Nguyen Hoang Hai and drop all charges against him."

In October 2010, the blogger completed a two-and-a-half year prison sentence for tax fraud. But instead of releasing him, the authorities told his family he was being held for investigation for "conducting propaganda" against the state.

The blogger co-founded the independent Free Vietnamese Journalists' Club in 2007.

He has written articles critical of China's foreign policy regarding Viet Nam and taken part in peaceful protests. He used his blogs to expose corruption and promote human rights in Viet Nam.

Nguyen Hoang Hai's family have been repeatedly denied prison visits. His lawyer saw him for the first time in March 2012 and said his client was ill and had lost a lot of weight.

"Until his release, Nguyen Hoang Hai must be given the medical attention he requires, and be granted regular access to his family and lawyer in accordance with international standards," said Donna Guest.

Two other well-known bloggers and members of the Free Vietnamese Journalists' Club may be tried at the same time as Nguyen Hoang Hai. Phan Thanh Hai, known as AnhBaSG, and Ta Phong Tan, whose blog is called "Justice and Truth", have been detained since October 2010 and September 2011 respectively.

"The Vietnamese authorities must respect and protect freedom of expression, association and assembly, and stop harassing those who promote and defend human rights," said Donna Guest.