

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 41/010/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 271
22 October 2006

Embargo Date: 22 October 2006 08:00 GMT

Viet Nam: Internet repression creates climate of fear

A new report released today by Amnesty International reveals a climate of fear in Viet Nam, with people afraid to post information online and Internet café owners forced to inform on their customers. Individuals are harassed, detained and imprisoned for expressing their peaceful political views online, with fear of prosecution fuelling widespread self-censorship.

But the report also reveals a growing network of activists and campaigners who are defying government controls and using the Internet to discuss human rights, as well as a fledgling democracy movement that is growing online.

The report comes one week before a UN meeting to discuss the future of the Internet – the Internet Governance Forum in Athens – where governments, companies and NGOs will discuss freedom of expression online and other issues. An Amnesty International delegation will deliver a petition signed by over 42,000 supporters of its *irrepressible.info* campaign, calling for an end to Internet repression.

“People in Viet Nam can be thrown in jail for the click of a mouse. The authorities have created a climate of fear, with online informers keeping track of web users. Those who stand up for free speech are publicly harassed and persecuted,” said Amnesty International.

“But a growing number of brave activists are defying Internet repression and using the Internet to fight for human rights. And the global nature of the Internet means that people all over the world can help call for greater online freedoms in Viet Nam – and support our campaign to free Vietnamese cyber-dissidents.

“The Vietnamese authorities must stop trying to stifle free speech online, and release the web users that have been unfairly imprisoned.”

Amnesty International is asking people to go to <http://irrepressible.info>, where they can support its campaign against Internet repression and email the Vietnamese authorities, demanding the release of people imprisoned for expressing their peaceful political beliefs online.

The report details the Vietnamese authorities' tightening of control over the Internet in recent years. Internet Service Providers are required to inform on web users; Internet café owners are required to monitor and inform on customers; and web users themselves are required to inform on sites that oppose the state. Laws ban web users from spreading information that causes “harm to national security or social order”.

Filtering and blocking of websites is also on the increase, according to the report. And while the Vietnamese authorities claim that filtering is for the protection of web users from pornography, a recent OpenNet Initiative report found little filtering of such material. Instead, blocked sites are those referring to known dissidents or mentioning democracy and human rights.

Amnesty International's report highlights the case of Nguyen Vu Binh, a 37-year-old journalist who was arrested in September 2002 for passing information through the Internet to overseas Vietnamese groups. At his trial in December 2003 he was charged with "spying" under Article 80 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, plus three years' house arrest on release. He is currently detained at Ba Sao prison camp in Nam Ha province in northern Viet Nam.

It also features Truong Quoc Huy, aged 25. He was first arrested in October 2005 with two other young people after chatting on a democracy and human rights website, held incommunicado for nine months then released. On 18 August 2006 he was rearrested in an Internet cafe in Ho Chi Minh City where he had logged on to a chatroom. His whereabouts remain unknown and no charges have been made public.

Amnesty International believes that both men are prisoners of conscience and calls for their inclusion in the release of prisoners which the authorities have announced will take place in late October.

In the case of Cong Thanh Do, a US citizen arrested in August and released 21 September 2006, the Vietnamese authorities claimed that he planned a terrorist plot to destroy the US consulate. However, the US ambassador reportedly said that the US had seen no evidence to support the claim and that they hoped for his release. Cong Thanh Do was a member of the People's Democratic Party, which advocates for political change human rights, and had posted numerous articles online about human rights in Viet Nam. Amnesty International believes that his arrest was aimed solely at punishing Cong Thanh Do for expressing his political views.

The report is part of Amnesty International's work on Internet repression linked to its *irrepressible.info* campaign, which launched in May 2006. The campaign highlights the rise of Internet censorship and the cases of individual prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their beliefs online. It enables web users to take action to combat Internet repression: emailing governments, supporting Amnesty's online petition, and spreading the campaign by publishing fragments of censored material from Amnesty's online database.

For the full report, *Viet Nam: A tightening net - web-based repression and censorship*, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa410082006>

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>