

215/95

AI INDEX: ASA 41/07/95

8 NOVEMBER 1995

VIET NAM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS IMPRISONMENT OF PARTY CRITICS

Following today's sentencing of two prominent critics of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV) Amnesty International is calling on the Vietnamese government to release them immediately and unconditionally.

Hoang Minh Chinh, 76, was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment and Do Trung Hieu, 57, to 15 months reportedly on charges of "abusing the rights of freedom and democracy to damage national security".

"It is appalling that the two men have been sentenced merely for questioning the policies of the Communist Party -- they are prisoners of conscience and should never have been tried in the first place," Amnesty International said today.

"It seems that their trial and sentences are simply designed to ensure calls for reform will not be heard in the run-up to next year's Party Congress."

Amnesty International is particularly concerned by their sentences because both men are suffering from serious health problems. Hoang Minh Chinh is said to suffer from heart and respiratory problems as well as low blood pressure. He is also known to be in severe pain and suffering paralysis in his arm due to a worsening of a long-standing shoulder injury. These problems are reportedly being exacerbated by his continued detention in B-14 prison outside Hanoi.

Do Trung Hieu has for many years suffered from a heart complaint and his health is feared to have deteriorated since his arrest. He has reportedly been allowed to see his family only once since his arrest.

The two men were sentenced by Hanoi People's Court following their arrest on 13 June. Both have been detained on previous occasions for years without trial for their criticism of trends within the CPV.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the fairness of the one-day trial, particularly as both men were reportedly denied representation by lawyers of their choice.

Hoang Minh Chinh, a communist activist since the age of 14 who rose to senior positions in the North Vietnamese regime was first detained in the 1960s for expressing criticism of Maoist tendencies in the Party. From 1967 to 1991 he spent 11 years in prison and nine under house arrest or surveillance for his repeated calls for political and economic reform. His latest arrest is believed

to have resulted from his recent calls for the rehabilitation of those purged during the 1960s and for expressing views critical of the Communist Party in interviews with foreign journalists.

Do Trung Hieu, a senior member of the CPV until his expulsion in 1992, is believed to have been arrested for a pamphlet he wrote earlier this year calling for a national reconciliation conference which would include expatriate Vietnamese groups. Do Trung Hieu was in charge of the communists' mobilization of intellectuals, students and youth in Saigon during the Viet Nam war.

The trial comes only days after two other prisoners of conscience were released and expelled from Viet Nam. Nguyen Tan Tri and Tran Quang Liem, both naturalized Americans of Vietnamese origin, were among nine defendants who were arrested in Ho Chi Minh City for their part in a peaceful political organization entitled the "Movement to Unite the People and Build Democracy". The men were involved in arranging a conference on democracy at the time of their arrest in November 1993.

Amnesty International welcomes the fact that Nguyen Tan Tri and Tran Quang Liem are no longer in detention but believes that their imprisonment and that of their Vietnamese colleagues was arbitrary, in contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Viet Nam is a party.

The organization is calling for the immediate release of all of the seven who still remain in detention. They are: Professor Nguyen Dinh Huy, Dr. Pham Tuong, Nguyen Ngoc Tan, Bui Kim Dinh, Nguyen Van Bien, Dong Tuy and Nguyen Van Chau -- and are all currently serving four to 15 year sentences.

ENDS\