

PUBLIC

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MEDICAL ACTION

Dr Nguyen Dan Que, prisoner of conscience

Viet Nam

Key words prisoner of conscience / doctor / freedom of expression

Arrest of Dr Nguyen Dan Que

Dr Nguyen Dan Que was arrested on 17 March 2003, seemingly as part of an ongoing crackdown by the Vietnamese authorities on freedom of expression. Amnesty International considers Dr Nguyen Dan Que to be a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate release.

The 60-year-old medical doctor was arrested outside his house in Ho Chi Minh City while on his way to an Internet cafe. Security officers removed some documents, a computer and a phone from his home. It is believed that his arrest was prompted by a statement he issued on 13 March 2003 and which was published abroad. In this statement Dr Nguyen Dan Que asserted that there was no freedom of information in Viet Nam. He also supported legislation put to the US House of Representatives in February 2003 which proposed steps to be taken for the promotion of freedom of information in Viet Nam.

On 22 March 2003 an official news report announced the arrest of Dr Nguyen Dan Que, stating that he had violated Article 80 of the Criminal Code, and that he would be brought to trial following completion of an investigation. Article 80 relates to charges of “spying” and provides for a prison sentence of between five years and life imprisonment, and the optional death penalty.

Background information

Dr Nguyen Dan Que is a longstanding human rights activist, who has been imprisoned twice before for a total of 18 years.

Born in 1942 in northern Viet Nam, Dr Nguyen Dan Que studied medicine at the Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) University and became a medical doctor at the age of 22. On graduation, he joined the teaching staff of the university medical school.

He was awarded United Nations scholarships for in-service training in Belgium, France and the United Kingdom in 1968, 1969 and 1972. In 1974 he returned to Viet Nam to join the Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) University Faculty of Medicine. After the end of the Viet Nam war in 1975 he became Director of Cho-Ray Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City. He reportedly became disillusioned with the new government’s health care policies and expressed criticisms openly. This led to his dismissal as hospital director.

Dr Que was arrested on 18 February 1978, accused of “rebellious against the regime” and forming a “reactionary” organization named the National Front of Progress. He was adopted as a prisoner of

conscience by Amnesty International and was released in 1988 after 10 years of detention without trial.

Following his release he founded the *Cao Trao Nhan Ban* (the High Tide of Humanism Movement) which called for democratic change in Viet Nam. He also became a member of Amnesty International in January 1990. He was arrested again in June 1990 and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in November 1991 after being charged with "activities aimed at overthrowing the people's government". Amnesty International again adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and issued a number of actions, including medical actions, on his case. Despite his deteriorating health, Dr Nguyen Dan Que was repeatedly denied access to adequate medical care in prison, and requests for further action were sent to the health professional network to appeal on Dr Nguyen Dan Que's behalf.¹

Dr Que was released under a special amnesty in September 1998. He and his family were asked by the authorities to leave Viet Nam and resettle in the USA, but they have declined to do so.

Since then, Dr Nguyen Dan Que has continued to advocate political reform, respect for human rights and freedom of expression under difficult circumstances. He has been subjected to constant surveillance and harassment by the authorities.

Recommendations

Please write letters in English or your own language to the authorities below, using professionally-headed paper if you use this in your profession:

- Introducing yourself in your professional capacity and/or as a member of Amnesty International;
- Expressing concern about the detention of Dr Nguyen Dan Que for the peaceful expression of his beliefs;
- Seeking information on Dr Nguyen Dan Que's current place of detention, his state of health and the charges against him;
- Calling on the authorities to allow him visits by family and lawyers and to have access to appropriate medical care;
- Urging the authorities to release Dr Nguyen Dan Que immediately and unconditionally.

Addresses

Phan Van Khai
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Hoang Hoa Tham
Ha Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Le Hong Anh
Minister of Public Security
Ministry of Public Security
15 Tran Binh Trong Street
Hoan Kiem District
Ha Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

¹ See, for example, ASA 41/003/1985, 1 March 1985; ASA 41/008/1993, 18 October 1993; ASA 41/003/1995, 16 February 1995, ASA 41/010/1996, 20 December 1996; ASA 41/010/1997, 1 July 1997; ASA 41/006/1998, 31 March 1998; ASA 41/008/1998, 30 September 1998.

Uong Chu Luu
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
25A Cat Linh Street
Dong Da District
Ha Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Copies of appeals

Nguyen Dy Nien
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
1 Ton That Dam Street
Ba Dinh District
Ha Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

and to diplomatic representatives of Viet Nam accredited to your country.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within six weeks of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response, referring to your previous letter(s). Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 31 May 2003, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Monitoring of actions

If you have access to e-mail you can help our attempt to monitor letter writing actions. If you write one, two or more letters please send us an e-mail and let us know. Please write in the subject line of your e-mail the index number of the action and the number of letters your write e.g. ASA 41/008/2003

Please send your message to medical@amnesty.org

Thank you