

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 41/013/2002 (Public)  
News Service No: 240  
20 December 2002

## **Viet Nam: Crackdown on dissidents continues**

Published

Amnesty International expressed profound shock at the 12 year prison sentence given to Nguyen Khac Toan today at the end of a trial which lasted less than one day.

Nguyen Khac Toan, a 47 year old former soldier from Ha Noi, briefly a teacher of mathematics and in recent years a businessman, became interested in human rights issues around 2000.

"The branding of Nguyen Khac Toan as a "spy" not only stifles freedom of expression through the use of loosely worded national security legislation but also criminalizes activities which are regarded as perfectly legal under international law and in most countries of the world," Amnesty International said.

"Nguyen Khac Toan is now serving a long prison term solely for the peaceful exercise of his fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association," added the international human rights organization.

Allegedly, Nguyen Khac Toan passed information to overseas Vietnamese activist groups on recent demonstrations and petitions in Ha Noi by farmers protesting against land confiscation by the authorities. He also apparently helped farmers' representatives while they were in Ha Noi with the drafting of petitions to the government.

Nguyen Khac Toan's mother, Tranh Thi Quyet, has only been permitted to visit her son in prison on one occasion since his arrest on 8 January 2002 in Ha Noi. Before visiting her son, Tran Thi Quyet had signed public petitions together with other dissidents and their families to call on the Vietnamese government to abide by international human rights standards. Nguyen Khac Toan was not allowed to attend his father's funeral in September 2002 despite pleas from the family.

Nguyen Khac Toan's lawyer has only been given very limited opportunity to speak alone with his client before the trial. Amnesty International has been informed that Nguyen Khac Toan's mother was given permission to be present at the trial. She was reportedly too ill to attend, and a request from his brother to be present at the trial was rejected.

Since the beginning of the year, the Vietnamese authorities have arrested several other people in a crackdown against dissident voices. Le Chi Quang, a 31 year old law graduate was sentenced to four years' imprisonment last month after distributing articles critical of the Vietnamese government by Email. Dr. Pham Hong Son, journalist Nguyen Vu Binh, and chemistry Professor Vu Ngoc Binh are currently detained for their advocacy of peaceful political reform and criticism of government policies, including

through use of the Internet.

Other dissidents such as journalist Bui Minh Quoc and writer and scholar Professor Tran Khue have been formally placed under house arrest under administrative detention orders, whilst others face constant surveillance and harassment by the authorities.

### **Background**

New regulations restricting access and use of the Internet have heightened Amnesty International's concerns about the current climate of repression in Viet Nam. In a recent review of Viet Nam's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Viet Nam is a State Party, the United Nations Human Rights Committee strongly criticized, inter alia, restrictions on freedom of expression and called for Vietnamese domestic law to be brought into line with international law and human rights standards.

Concerns were also raised regarding the independence of the judiciary, its susceptibility to political pressure, and the use of administrative detention which "provides for persons to be kept under house arrest for up to two years, without the intervention of a judge or a judicial officer".

### 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>