

AI Index: PRE 01/036/2013  
23 January 2013

## **David Cameron should call for release of prisoners of conscience in Viet Nam as top party official visits UK**

Prime Minister David Cameron should call on Viet Nam's government to halt its crackdown on freedom of expression and release all prisoners of conscience, Amnesty International said on the first day of an official visit to the UK by Nguyen Phu Trong, the General Secretary of the ruling Communist Party of Viet Nam.

At the Prime Minister's invitation, Nguyen Phu Trong will visit the UK for two days. The visit marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Amnesty International Researcher on Viet Nam Rupert Abbott said:

"Mr Cameron should raise concerns publicly about Viet Nam's appalling restrictions on free speech and the scores of human rights defenders who have been locked up there.

"He should demand the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience – those imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

"Month after month, Viet Nam's government is locking up those who are simply speaking their mind about issues that are uncomfortable for the authorities – including bloggers, songwriters, lawyers, labour activists, members of religious groups and democracy activists.

"The UK should prioritise human rights in its growing relationship with Viet Nam.

"Cameron should use the opportunity of Nguyen Phu Trong's visit to speak up for those who the Vietnamese authorities have silenced."

The official visit comes at a time when Viet Nam's government has stepped up its crackdown on freedom of expression.

Vaguely worded provisions in Viet Nam's penal code are used to criminalise peaceful political and social dissent and criticism of the government.

In 2012 alone, dozens of peaceful dissidents were imprisoned, with many sentenced to long prison terms in trials that failed to meet international standards.

In September, for example, three popular bloggers including Nguyen Van Hai, known as Dieu Cay (the "peasant's pipe"), were tried for "conducting propaganda" against the state and sentenced to between four and 12 years' imprisonment. They are founding members of the Free Vietnamese Journalists' Club and have used their blogs to promote human rights.

The crackdown on freedom of expression has continued in 2013.

On 9 January, 13 peaceful activists were sentenced to between three and 13 years' imprisonment on charges of undertaking "activities aimed at overthrowing" the government. The Vietnamese authorities suspect them of having ties to the US-based political party Viet Tan, a group calling for peaceful reform in Viet Nam, but which Viet Nam's government labels as a terrorist organisation.