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Viet Nam: Time to release ill Catholic priest and prisoner of conscience

Amnesty International is dismayed to learn that the authorities in Viet Nam have today returned to prison Catholic priest Father Nguyen Van Ly, a prisoner of conscience who suffered a stroke on 14 November 2009.

The Vietnamese authorities should immediately and unconditionally release Father Ly into the care of his family so that they can ensure he receives the proper medical care, including hospitalization, that he needs.

The Vietnamese authorities returned Father Ly to prison on the same day that the President of Viet Nam, Nguyen Minh Triet, met with Pope Benedict XVI at the Holy See. This is the first such meeting to take place. The Vatican authorities should take this important opportunity to raise the case of Father Nguyen Van Ly, and call strongly for his immediate release from prison.

Father Ly had been receiving medical treatment in Prison Hospital 198, administered by the Ministry of Public Security in Ha Noi, since his stroke, which caused paralysis on one side. His family report that while he has regained some movement, he remains partially paralyzed.

Father Ly, a 63 year old peaceful pro-democracy activist, has been serving an eight year sentence in Ba Sao prison, Ha Nam province in northern Viet Nam since March 2007. For most of this time he has been held in solitary confinement, and has suffered from high blood pressure and other health problems. In the last seven months he experienced several bouts of ill-health, including temporary loss of movement on one side of his body. The prison authorities have neither provided a proper diagnosis nor adequate medical treatment.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called for the immediate and unconditional release of Father Ly. In March 2007 he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for "conducting propaganda" against the state under Article 88 of the national security section of the Penal Code. He was accused of involvement in the internet-based pro-democracy movement Bloc 8406, which he co-founded in April 2006, and of helping to set up banned political groups. He also secretly published a dissident journal, To Do Ngon Luan (Freedom and Democracy).

Background

Father Ly was first jailed for his criticism of government policies on religion in the late 1970's, and has already spent some 17 years as a prisoner of conscience, for calling for respect for human rights.

Currently he is one of more than 40 dissidents imprisoned in Viet Nam as the authorities aim to suppress any criticism of government policies and allegations about human rights violations. The authorities use vaguely-worded articles of the Penal Code to stifle and criminalize freedom of expression, in breach of international treaties that Viet Nam has ratified.

This year Viet Nam rejected important recommendations made by states under the Universal Periodic Review process, including to amend or repeal national security provisions of the Penal Code inconsistent with international law; to remove other restrictions on dissent, debate, political opposition, and freedoms of expression and assembly; and to release prisoners of conscience.

Public Document

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