

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Vietnam: Leading elderly dissident to be freed**

Amnesty International is relieved at news of the imminent release of yet another leading dissident and prisoner of conscience, Colonel Pham Que Duong. He was sentenced at a hearing today in Ho Chi Minh City to 19 months imprisonment after having been detained for over 18 months - in other words to the time he has already spent in detention. The organization is increasingly concerned that the judicial system is being manipulated in an illegal and arbitrary way to silence government critics.

"Once again an elderly government critic who has languished in pre-trial detention, well over the period permissible under Vietnamese law, has finally had his day in a closed court only to be set free by the judge. Presumably, had his trial taken place six months ago, he would have spent the last half year free, at home with his family," said Amnesty International today.

Colonel Pham Que Duong, 73, a military historian, former editor and member of the Communist Party, was detained on 28 December 2002. He is a prominent critic of government policies, corruption and the repression of dissent. He was convicted of "abusing democratic rights to jeopardize the interests of the State, and the legitimate rights and interests of social organisations and citizens."

On 9 July a fellow dissident, Professor Tran Khue, 69, who had been arrested at the same time as Pham Que Duong, was given a similar sentence - "time served" for a conviction on identical charges. Professor Tran Khue was a former professor of Vietnamese and Chinese literature and a writer.

Both men, along with other dissidents, requested official permission to form an Anti-Corruption Association in 2001 and have been accused of sending messages critical of the Vietnamese authorities to anti-government overseas groups. Much of the evidence against them was garnered from email messages and phone records leading to growing concerns about the right to freedom of expression and information, particularly in cyberspace, in Viet Nam. This evidence was set out in two secret official "Directives" that were obtained and published by Amnesty International in June 2003.

The advanced age of many recently arrested government critics has not discouraged the authorities from detaining them for long periods.

"Locking up old men for years on end for nothing more than publicly speaking out against government policies is legally and morally wrong," Amnesty International said today.

Several other elderly dissidents remain behind bars. Dr Nguyen Dan Que, 62, a distinguished doctor and former hospital director and a long-standing human rights activist, has been held in

incommunicado detention since his most recent arrest on 17 March 2003. Dr Que has spent a total 18 years in prison since the late 1970s.

Nguyen Dinh Huy, 72, a former English and History professor, was arrested in November 1993 and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment under national security legislation having previously been detained for "re-education" without charge or trial for 17 years until 1992.

Both men are regarded as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

For further information, please see the following reports:

**Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: In place of veneration, incarceration: Elderly prisoners of conscience**

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA410322003>

**Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: Two official Directives relating to anti-government activities**

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa410182003>

**Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: Freedom of expression under threat in cyberspace**

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa410372003>