

EXTRA 41/99 Fear for safety/possible prisoner of conscience 12 March 1999**SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM Nguyen Thanh Giang, aged 63 (m)**

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of 63-year old Nguyen Thanh Giang, a prominent political dissident, whose whereabouts are still not known one week after he was arrested by security officers in the capital Ha Noi on 4 March 1999.

He has reportedly been arrested for possessing and smuggling documents critical of the government, but no official statement has yet been made about his arrest or about any charges against him.

Nguyen Thanh Giang is a well-known and highly respected geologist and writer who has been publicly critical of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV) for at least 10 years. He has written numerous articles, mainly published abroad, in which he advocates democracy, human rights and peaceful political reform. As a result he has recently come under scrutiny and been harassed by the authorities. In 1995 and 1996 he was reportedly forced to resign from senior positions at the Geographical Society of Viet Nam, the National Institute of Geophysics and the University of Ha Noi. During 1997 he was frequently summoned for questioning by the police and in March 1998 he was reportedly arrested for three days while trying to raise funds for a humanitarian project in southern Viet Nam.

Legislation in Viet Nam provides no distinction between armed opposition to the government and peaceful political dissent and it is possible that Nguyen Thanh Giang may face charges under "Crimes Against National Security" of the Vietnamese Criminal Code, resulting in a long prison sentence. If so, Amnesty International believes he would be a prisoner of conscience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite the release under a presidential amnesty in September 1998 of several long-term prisoners of conscience - including those advocating peaceful political change - public criticism of the government or of CPV policies by dissidents is still not tolerated in Viet Nam. The few who do speak out publicly to advocate peaceful reform, in particular well-known academics and former CPV members, have been harassed and imprisoned. Most recently, retired General Tran Do, a senior party member and prominent dissident, was expelled from the CPV in January 1999 for criticizing its policies and has said that he is kept under strict surveillance by the authorities. This is also believed to be the case for other dissidents.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or French or your own language:

- expressing concern about the arrest of Nguyen Thanh Giang on 4 March 1999, reportedly for being in possession of documents critical of the government;
- expressing concern that one week following his arrest, his whereabouts and any charges against him are still unknown;

- urging the authorities to immediately make public information about the whereabouts of Nguyen Thanh Giang and any charges against him;
- urging the authorities to release Nguyen Thanh Giang immediately and unconditionally if he is detained solely for the expression of his peaceful political beliefs;
- urging that while he is in detention, he is allowed immediate and regular access to lawyers, family, and a doctor.

APPEALS TO (please note, fax tones can be difficult to obtain. It is better to try during office hours local time + 7GMT):

Phan Van Khai
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Hoang Hoa Tham
Ha Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Ha Noi, Viet Nam
Faxes: + 844 8234137 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Le Minh Huong
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Tran Binh Trong
H11 Noi
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Ha Noi, Viet Nam
Faxes: + 844 826 0773 (If voice, ask for fax)
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Socialist Republic of Viet Nam accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 April 1999.