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MEDICAL CONCERN

**Dr Nguyen Dan Que
VIET NAM**

Amnesty International is concerned by the continued imprisonment of Dr Nguyen Dan Que and by reports that he is in a very poor state of health. Dr Nguyen Dan Que, an adopted prisoner of conscience, was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment and five years of house arrest after a trial on 29 November 1991. He was formally charged under Article 73 of the Criminal Code with "activities aimed at overthrowing the people's government". The charges were the result of a political manifesto issued in May 1990 by a movement of which he was a founder member and which was highly critical of the government. AI is concerned by the severity of the sentence, particularly as Dr Dan Que previously spent ten years in prison after being arrested in 1978 for criticism of the government. During this earlier term of imprisonment, he was never brought to trial.

Dr Dan Que is now aged 52 and is reported to suffer from hypertension, a peptic ulcer and kidney stones. He is said to be in considerable pain from the kidney stones; in late 1994 this caused him to fall and to sustain a lacerated injury to the forehead. It is not known what medical care he is receiving. Dan Que is held in Xuan Loc camp where he still appears to be in virtual solitary confinement. He is allowed only one very brief family visit per month.

Background

Dr Nguyen Dan Que was born in 1942 in northern Viet Nam, studied medicine at Saigon University and, on graduation, joined the teaching staff of the University medical school. He specialized in thyroid disease and diabetes and, under the sponsorship of the World Health Organization, undertook research in Paris, Brussels (Université Libre de Bruxelles) and London (Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital). He returned from London to Viet Nam in July 1974 and, after the end of the Viet Nam war in mid-1975, became Director of Cho-Ray Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City. He reportedly became disillusioned with the new government's policies on health care and expressed his criticisms openly. This led to his dismissal as hospital director and in February 1978 he was arrested and accused of "rebelling against the regime" and forming a "reactionary" organization named National Front for Progress. He was released in 1988 after ten years of detention without trial.

Following his release, Dr Nguyen Dan Que became a founder member of a political movement established in 1990 under the name of the *Cao Trao Nhan Ban* (High Tide of Humanism Movement). On 11 May 1990 this organization issued a manifesto calling on individuals both in Viet Nam and abroad to sign a petition demanding non-violent political, social and economic change for Viet Nam, including the introduction of a multi-party system

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of government. Dr Dan Que was arrested one month later on 14 June 1990. He had also become an international member of Amnesty International in January 1990.

Dr Nguyen Dan Que was brought to trial on 29 November 1991 at the People's Court in Ho Chi Minh City. He was accused of carrying out propaganda against the government, recruiting followers to his movement and planning to overthrow the government. One of the charges against him was "membership of Amnesty International". It appears that at his trial he did not have access to independent legal counsel of his choice.

Dr Nguyen Dan Que's case has attracted considerable publicity and there has been much action on his behalf. The United Nations' Working Group on arbitrary detention examined his case at its April 1993 session and declared his detention to be arbitrary and in contravention of articles within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. A US senator attempted to visit Dr Dan Que in prison during a diplomatic mission to Vietnam in August 1993, but was denied access at the last minute.

There have been numerous other initiatives on Dan Que's behalf, including other attempts by foreign nationals to visit him in prison, but these have been unsuccessful. Amnesty International medical groups have, over a period of years, appealed to the Vietnamese authorities for his release. These appeals have remained unanswered and there appears to be no indication that the Vietnamese authorities are considering relaxing his sentence.

Amnesty International is once again renewing its appeals for Dr Nguyen Dan Que's unconditional release from prison.