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VIET NAM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AGAINST THE TRIAL OF HA SI PHU AND LE HONG HA

Amnesty International today condemned the trial of two prominent Vietnamese dissidents, Le Hong Ha and Ha Si Phu, who are accused by the authorities of divulging state secrets and face 15 years' imprisonment under the Vietnamese criminal code.

“Le Hong Ha and Ha Si Phu face conviction today for questioning the political views of the Vietnamese government. This is not a crime, it's a fundamental right: the right to freedom of expression,” Amnesty International said.

The human rights organisation believes that both Ha SI Phu and Le Hong Ha are prisoners of conscience, detained by Vietnamese authorities solely because of their peaceful political dissident. As their trial commenced, the organization called on the Vietnamese authorities to release them.

Trials in Viet Nam, especially for political cases are routinely unfair. It is likely that Le Hong Ha and Ha Si Phu will not have access to the defence lawyer of their choice, and will be denied the right to call and question witnesses.

Ha Si Phu (also known as Nguyen Xuan Tu) is a 56-year-old writer and scientist, who has lived in Dalat with his family since 1975. He declined an invitation to be a member of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, but often wrote for official publications. In recent years he became increasingly critical of the Vietnamese Government. One of his best known critiques is “Farewell to Ideology” which he wrote in 1995. Ha Si Phu gave interviews in 1995 to a number of foreign radio stations, in which he called for political change in Viet Nam. He was arrested on 5 December last year.

Le Hong HA is a former high-ranking member of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, who was expelled in June 1995 at the request of the President Le Duc Anh. He was arrested in December 1995, shortly after Ha Si Phu, apparently because of his peaceful political views, notably his support for party dissidents Hoang Minh Chinh and Do Trung Hieu who were arrested earlier in 1995.

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