

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 41/09/90

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Date: 4 July 1990

**MEDICAL CONCERN**

**Quach Vinh Nien  
VIET NAM**

Amnesty International is seeking information from the Vietnamese authorities about the conditions of detention and state of health of Quach Vinh Nien, a political prisoner whom AI believes may be a prisoner of conscience. He is sentenced to life imprisonment and is held in a "re-education" camp.

BACKGROUND

Quach Vinh Nien was an officer in the South Vietnamese army. Following the cessation of hostilities in Viet Nam in mid-1975, most senior members of the armed forces, civil servants and the South Vietnamese political establishment were summoned to register for a period of "re-education", which effectively meant detention without trial in labour camps. Quach Vinh Nien reported for "re-education" in May 1975 and was detained until August 1976. Following his release he is reported to have become a member of a small Roman Catholic group which, according to information received by Amnesty International, tried to print a newspaper which expressed opposition to government policies and the "lack of freedom". It is believed that the paper was never actually circulated.

On 14 June 1978 police officers are reported to have raided Quach Vinh Nien's house and arrested him; three others are reported to have been arrested at the same time. He was detained without trial until August 1980 when he was brought to trial and is reported to have been convicted of fighting the communist government, disloyalty to the government and writing newspaper articles. He had no defence counsel at his trial, which concluded with a sentence of life imprisonment, and such reports as are available indicate that the presiding judge did not allow him adequate opportunity to present his defence. A Roman Catholic priest, who was the leader of the religious group to which Quach Vinh Nien belonged, had been arrested earlier in 1977 and sentenced to death, a sentence which was later commuted to life imprisonment.

As far as Amnesty International is aware, no details of the charges against Quach Vinh Nien, the legislation under which he was tried, or the evidence produced during the trial have been made public. He is thought to have written a letter of appeal against his sentence and to have appeared before an appeals court in October 1980, but to have had his sentence upheld at that hearing. Amnesty International believes Quach Vinh Nien may be imprisoned solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association.

He is currently held in camp 1870A at Xuan Phuoc in Phu Khanh province in the south of the country and is permitted a 15-minute family visit only once every three months. Reports of his ill-health have been persistent, although little information is available to Amnesty International. Reports state that his joints are swollen, causing him difficulty in walking, but that he has to carry out heavy labour as do all those imprisoned in the camps. Conditions in the "re-education" camps remain poor. Most camps have small ill-equipped

dispensaries, but it is reported that qualified doctors are not regularly available. Doctors who are themselves imprisoned have sometimes been able to help other detainees, although there are difficulties in obtaining necessary medication.

In the course of 1987 and 1988 a large number of prisoners were released from camps following a series of government amnesties. Official Vietnamese figures state that only 130 political prisoners remain in detention, but Amnesty International is seeking to clarify the situation of a number of other prisoners about whom it has information.

Amnesty International is seeking to ensure that Quach Vinh Nien receive access to medical attention and continues to seek further information on the reasons for his arrest and continued imprisonment.

INTERNAL

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To : Medical professionals

From: Medical Office / Research Department - Asia

Date: 4 July 1990

**MEDICAL LETTER-WRITING ACTION**

**Quach Vinh Nien  
VIET NAM**

Letters of enquiry are requested from medical professionals on behalf of Quach Vinh Nien, who is sentenced to life imprisonment and is reported to be in ill-health. Amnesty International believes he may be imprisoned solely for peaceful criticism of the government and is currently investigating his case to determine whether he may be adopted as a prisoner of conscience. Letters to the authorities listed below should

- . raise the case of Quach Vinh Nien, sentenced to life imprisonment in August 1980 for "anti-government activities" (the name and location of his "re-education" camp should be given, together with the date of his arrest and trial)
- . note reports that he is in ill-health, seek information on the medical facilities available in camp 1870A, and seek assurances that he will be provided with medical attention
- . express concern that Quach Vinh Nien was sentenced after a trial in which he had no defence counsel and which does not appear to have conformed to international standards of fair trial
- . seek information on the precise charges which were brought against him and what activities he was engaged in which were considered to constitute "anti-government activities"
- . welcome the recent amnesties and release of prisoners from "re-education" camps and urge that Quach Vinh Nien's case is re-examined to determine that he is not imprisoned solely for peaceful political activity

ADDRESSES

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