



## PRESS RELEASE

**Co-Chairman  
Frank R. Wolf**

**Co-Chairman  
James P. McGovern**

**January 19, 2012**

**For Immediate Release**

**Contact: Kalinda Stephenson or  
Jordan Tama (202-225-3599)**

***Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Co-Chairmen Call for Immediate and Unconditional Release of all Prisoners of Conscience in Vietnam***

***Co-Chairmen condemn detention of Vietnamese Buddhist and Christian social activists, human rights lawyers, citizen journalists and bloggers***

Washington – Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Co-Chairmen Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) and James P. McGovern (D-MA) today called for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience in Vietnam.

While condemning all violations of freedom of expression in Vietnam, they voiced particular concern over the recent detention of 17 social activists of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Dong Chua Cuu The) and the Presbyterian Church, as well as the arrest and sentencing of Vietnamese Buddhist dissidents Nguyen Van Lia and Tran Hoai An and Roman Catholic priest and democracy activist Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly. Wolf and McGovern also strongly criticized the continued detention of lawyer activist Cu Huy Ha Vu, land rights activist Bui Thi Minh Hang and citizen bloggers Nguyen Van Hai (also known as Dieu Cay) and Paulus Le Son, among many others.

“The government of Vietnam should cease its repression of the Vietnamese people and immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners,” said Congressman Wolf. “Freedom of religion and conscience are universal human rights which must be respected in all countries.”

“There is no excuse for Vietnam to target its citizens who are exercising their political and religious rights in a peaceful manner,” said Congressman McGovern. “The message is simple: Release all prisoners of conscience and allow the free expression of religion and thought.”

In March 2007, Father Ly was arrested for pro-democracy activities including having issued a manifesto calling for peaceful struggle to establish human rights and democracy in Vietnam. After a temporary medical parole, Father Ly was sent back to prison on July 25, 2011, to serve an additional five years behind bars followed by five years house arrest.

Nguyen Van Lia and Tran Hoai An, both members of the Hoa Hao Buddhist sect, were sentenced to five and three years imprisonment, respectively, in December 2011 for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state.” Nguyen Van Lia, aged 72, and Tran Hoai An had briefed foreign diplomats about restrictions on religious freedom and other human rights violations, and met with the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom (USCIRF) when delegates visited Vietnam in May of 2009. Nguyen Van Lia is reportedly in poor health.

The social activists belonging to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and the Presbyterian Church have been detained without access to family members or legal counsel. Following the first arrests on July 30, 2011, and most recently around Christmas, their detention has been largely unacknowledged by the Vietnamese government.

Bui Thi Minh Hang, a Vietnamese land rights activist who is critical of the Chinese government, was arrested November 27, 2011 outside Notre Dame Cathedral in Ho Chi Minh City for conducting a silent protest against the arrests of peaceful protesters in Hanoi earlier that morning. On November 28, 2011, she was ordered detained without trial for 24 months in the Thanh Ha Education Center in Binh Xuyen district in the Vinh Phuc province.

Cu Huy Ha Vu, a well-known legal scholar, human rights defender and environmental activist, was sentenced to seven years in prison in April 2011 for “conducting propaganda” against the state. His sentence was upheld on appeal in August 2011. He had twice submitted criminal complaints against the prime minister, once in an attempt to stop a controversial bauxite mining project and the other time for challenging the legality of a ban on class-action complaints.

Internet blogger Nguyen Van (Hoang) Hai (also known as Dieu Cay) co-founded the independent Free Vietnamese Journalists’ Club in 2007 and wrote articles critical of China’s foreign policies with regard to Vietnam. He had publicly criticized government policies before his arrest in April 2008 and spoke out for human rights in Vietnam on his blog. He was to have been released in October 2010, but is still being held in indefinite detention on politically motivated charges of tax fraud and has been denied access to his family and legal counsel. In July 2011, his wife went again to the prison where he was last detained to try to see him and was reportedly told by a security official that he has “lost his arm.”

Writer Paulus Le Son, an active contributor to prominent citizen journalist sites including Vietnam Redemptorist News, was arrested in Hanoi in August 2011. The day before he was abducted by police, he tried to attend the hearing of Cu Huy Ha Vu’s appeal against his seven year sentence. On his blog, Son wrote about religious issues and social and political events in Vietnam including anti-Chinese demonstrations and the increase in police violence.

The Vietnamese Government’s actions violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam is a party. The Covenant says that “no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention” (Article 9) and that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression” (Article 19).

The mission of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is to promote and advocate human rights in a nonpartisan manner both inside and outside of Congress.

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