

141 International Human Rights Leagues gathered in Lisbon condemn crack-down on human rights defenders in Vietnam

LISBON, 24 April 2007 (VCHR) - Members of 141 leagues from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe, meeting in Lisbon, Portugal from 22-24 April 2007 for the **36th Congress of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)** adopted **two resolutions** condemning violations of human rights in Vietnam. In an **Urgent Resolution**, the Congress condemned the recent crack-down on human rights defenders, religious and political dissidents, called on Vietnam to cease repression against all “non-recognized” religious movements including the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, and launch *“a real and effective reforms aimed at building a society grounded on the respect of democratic freedoms and fundamental human rights”* (see full text of the resolution below). M. **Vo Van Ai**, President of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, represented Vietnam at the Congress.

The Congress also adopted a [**General Resolution**](#) deploring increasing human rights abuses under Vietnam’s accelerated economic liberalization policies (*“doi moi”*) : *“In its haste to join the WTO, the Vietnamese government has made no study of the negative impacts this would have on Vietnam’s most vulnerable people”... “Doi Moi has resulted in a combination of the worst aspects of unbridled capitalism with the worst in State totalitarianism : to meet the requirements of economic globalization, poor sectors of the population are left to fend for themselves”, whilst Vietnam “exports labour to 40 countries with no worker protection”... Women are particularly vulnerable : “Domestic violence, trafficking in women and girls, the growing problem of AIDS/HIV and violations of reproductive rights are matters of grave concern”, declared the FIDH, deploring that “Vietnam is paying mere lip service to its legal and written commitments to ensure respect for women’s rights”. The organization called on Vietnam to “authorize the emergence of a free press and independent civil society movements, the only safeguards against excessive trade liberalization and abuse of power”.*

At the Congress, the FIDH also released its very first Mission Report on Vietnam, [**“Twelve Human Rights Defenders take the Floor”**](#), conducted in a joint programme with the Geneva-based World Organization against Torture (OMCT). During this Mission, FIDH international lawyers met with prominent dissidents Thich Quang Do, Nguyen Dan Que, Hoang Minh Chinh etc.

The FIDH, founded in 1922, is France’s oldest and most prominent and long-standing

human rights organisation, with 141 leagues around the world.

Urgent Resolution on the situation of Human Rights in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

The FIDH and its 141 leagues are stupefied to learn of the circumstances in which Vietnamese dissidents were sentenced to prison terms of up to 8 years at an unfair trial on 30 March 2007. The defendants (Nguyen Van Ly, Nguyen Phong, Nguyen Binh Thanh, Hoang Thi Anh Dao, and Le Thi Le Hang), were charged with “*carrying out propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*” (Article 88 of the SRV Criminal Code). They had no defence lawyers and were denied the right to defend themselves. A photo of Roman Catholic Priest Nguyen Van Ly being physically gagged by Police during the trial remains in our minds.

Alongside these exorbitant prison terms for acts which are nothing other than the exercise of freedom of expression guaranteed by the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, this trial, which was highly-publicized by the Vietnamese authorities, seems like a brazen gesture of defiance to the international community, which Vietnam has shamefully deceived.

The trial was part of a large-scale crackdown in which several dissidents and human rights defenders were harassed and detained, including lawyers **Nguyen Van Dai** and **Le Thi Cong Nhan** (arrested on 6 March 2007) and **Le Quoc Quan** (arrested on 8 March 2007). The latter is accused of “*activities aimed at overthrowing the Vietnamese government*”, a crime punishable by terms of up to life in prison, or even the death penalty. On 15 March 2007, members of the Norwegian Rafto Human Rights Foundation were arrested as they sought to hand the Rafto Diploma to Buddhist dissident Thich Quang Do. Thich Quang Do was awarded the 2006 Rafto Prize for Human Rights Defenders, but the government refused to let him travel to Norway to receive the award. Security Police arrested the Rafto representatives as they arrived at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Ho Chi Minh City, where Thich Quang Do is under house arrest.

For the past year, it appeared that Vietnam was tolerating greater freedom to its citizens, and refraining from repressive practices. However, recent events have proved that this short-lived, illusionary freedom was simply a façade, aimed to placate the international community and enable Vietnam to obtain certain coveted advantages, such as its removal from the U.S. blacklist of “Countries of Particular Concern” for

violations of religious freedom, membership of the World Trade Organization, Permanent Normal Trade Relations status with the United States, and the smooth hosting of the APEC Summit in Hanoi in November 2006. Once it had achieved all these objectives, Vietnam cynically embarked on this crackdown against all forms of dissent.

The FIDH and its 141 leagues emphasize that the respect of human rights cannot be used as a mere bargaining tool in international negotiations, but must be the primary objective of every State worthy of its name. The organizations therefore demand the release of all persons detained in Vietnam for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, belief and association. Moreover, the FIDH and its member leagues call for the immediate and unconditional cessation of the policy of repression against all “non-recognised” religious communities such as the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, and the launching of real and effective reforms aimed at building a society grounded on the respect of democratic freedoms and fundamental human rights in Vietnam.