

## **Pro-democracy blogger Dieu Cay is on hunger strike**

**PARIS-GENEVA, 19 July 2013 (OBSERVATORY & VCHR) - *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), together with the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR), express deep concern for the health of human rights defender Mr. Nguyen Van Hai (aka Dieu Cay) who has reportedly been on hunger strike in prison for at least 25 days.***

Mr. **Dieu Cay**, prominent blogger and founder of the “Club of Free Journalists of Vietnam”, well known for his online writings calling for greater respect for human rights and democratic reforms, is currently detained in Prison Camp No. 6 in Thanh Chuong District, Nghe An Province in Central Viet Nam. On July 16, 2013, Ms. Duong Thi Tan, the former wife of Mr. Dieu Cay, went to visit him in prison, but was refused the right to see him. A senior prison official (Lt.-Colonel of Security Police) told her that Mr. Dieu Cay was currently being punished for “*disturbing order*”. Mrs. Nguyen Thi Nga, the wife of political prisoner Mr. Nguyen Xuan Nghia, who is detained in the same prison camp, visited her husband the same day and asked for news of Mr. Dieu Cay. Prison wardens immediately intervened and ordered her not to discuss this “*sensitive question*”. As she was about to leave, Mr. Nguyen Xuan Nghia shouted out “*Did you know that Dieu Cay has been on hunger strike for the past 25 days?*”. Wardens swiftly gagged him and dragged him away.

Our organisations are extremely concerned for the health of Mr. Dieu Cay. Prison Camp No. 6 has no adequate medical facilities, and it is situated in a remote, mountainous region some 70 kilometres from Vinh, the nearest town. If Mr. Dieu Cay’s health suffers as a result of a prolonged hunger strike, he would not have access to urgent medical treatment.

*“Mr. Dieu Cay has persistently claimed his innocence, but he found no justice in Viet Nam’s legal system”,* said VCHR President Vo Van Ai. *“So he is speaking out in the only way a prisoner can - by putting his own safety on the line in an act of nonviolent protest. His detention is shameless and unlawful - Viet Nam should set him free”.*

*“Mr. Dieu Cay’s situation illustrates the widespread international and domestic protest over an ongoing government crackdown on freedom of expression, both online and offline”* deplored FIDH President Karim Lahidji. *“We call for the immediate and unconditional release of Dieu Cay and of all human rights defenders and cyber-dissidents in Viet Nam”.*

*“At last, the authorities of Viet Nam should abide by the opinion issued by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in 2009, declaring Mr. Dieu Cay’s arbitrary and in violation of international human rights law, by immediately releasing him”, urged OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock. “It is high time that the authorities of Viet Nam finally put an end to their crackdown on Internet activists and human rights defenders in the country as a way to silence critical voices”.*

Scores of human rights defenders and cyber-dissidents are currently serving long prison sentences or awaiting trial in Vietnam (1). Three bloggers, **Dinh Nhat Uy**, **Pham Viet Dao** and **Truong Duy Nhat**, arrested in the past two months alone, face prison sentences of up to seven years for *“abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State”* (Article 258 of the Criminal Code). Their blogs are aimed at informing people about human rights and advocating ways to promote and protect them. On May 16, 2013, University student Ms. **Nguyen Phuong Uyen**, 21, and Mr. **Dinh Nguyen Kha**, 25 (the brother of Dinh Nhat Uy) were sentenced respectively to six and eight years in prison and three years house arrest for advocating for human rights.

Mr. Dieu Cay was first convicted in 2009 on trumped-up charges of *“tax evasion”* after a manifestly unfair and closed trial. Instead of being released upon completing the sentence in 2010, Mr. Dieu Cay was charged with a second offence of *“propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”* (Article 88 of the Criminal Code). Article 88 is among several repressive provisions in Vietnamese law that are routinely used to criminalise free speech and imprison peaceful dissidents. He was detained incommunicado for over a year. In late 2011, Mr. Dieu Cay staged a 29-day hunger strike to protest his unfair detention.

On September 24, 2012, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison and five years probationary detention at a trial in Ho Chi Minh City that broadly violated fair trial standards and was widely condemned by the international community. The verdict was upheld on appeal in December 2012.

Our organisations strongly condemn the crackdown that has been targeting Internet activists and human rights defenders in Viet Nam for the past few years, and urge the authorities of Viet Nam to abide by the resolution that was adopted by consensus in June 2012 by the UN Human Rights Council, affirming that the right to freedom of expression online must be protected, and calling on States to *“promote and facilitate access to the Internet”*.

Our organisations further reiterate their call on the Vietnamese authorities to ensure in all circumstances that human rights defenders are able to work without any fear of reprisals and to conform to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the

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Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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(1) For more information, see FIDH-VCHR joint report, **Bloggers and Netizens Behind Bars: Restrictions on Internet Freedom in Vietnam**, February 2013, and previous Urgent Interventions by the Observatory (FIDH-OMCT) on Viet Nam.