

Vietnam Committee : Twenty-three sample cases of detained Vietnamese civil society advocates

- Most Venerable **THICH HUYEN QUANG**, (secular name Le Dinh Nhan), 87, Supreme Patriarch of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV). First arrested in 1977, then sent into internal exile in 1982 for protesting the creation of the State-sponsored Vietnam Buddhist Church, Thich Huyen Quang has spent over 23 years in prison and house arrest for his advocacy of religious freedom, democracy and human rights. In 1993, he issued a "Declaration" calling for free elections and multi-party system. In a surprise gesture of religious tolerance, Thich Huyen Quang was received by Prime Minister Phan Van Khai in Hanoi in April 2003. Despite this landmark meeting, the authorities launched a brutal crack-down on the UBCV after a peaceful Assembly was held in Binh Dinh in October 2003 to elect a new leadership. Thich Huyen Quang was arrested on 9 October along with other UBCV leaders. He was placed under detention for alleged "*possession of state secrets*". Thich Huyen Quang is held *incommunicado* at the Nguyen Thieu Monastery in Binh Dinh. He suffers from high-blood pressure and arthritis, and is in very poor health. Other UBCV leaders arrested in the crackdown include : Venerable **Thich Tue Sy, Thich Thanh Huyen, Thich Nguyen Ly** and Thich Huyen Quang's personal assistant **Thich Dong Tho** (formally sentenced to 2 years administrative detention under Decree 31/CP), and Venerable **Thich Thien Hanh, Thich Vien Dinh, Thich Thai Hoa, Thich Hai Tang** (sentenced by verbal orders of the local Security Police).

- Very Venerable **THICH QUANG DO** (Dang Phuc Tue), 76, the UBCV's second highest dignitary. A 2004 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Thich Quang Do has also spent over two decades under detention for his non-violent advocacy of democratic freedoms and rights. First arrested in 1977, sent into internal exile in 1982 in Thai Binh (Northern Vietnam), he was sentenced to 5 years in prison and 5 years house arrest in 1995 organizing a UBCV Rescue Mission for flood victims. Released in a government Amnesty in 1998 thanks to international pressure, he was held under continuous Police Surveillance ("*I have left a small prison only to come into a larger one*" he said). In 2001, Thich Quang Do was sentenced to 2 years "administrative detention" for issuing a landmark "Appeal for Democracy in Vietnam". Euro MP Olivier Dupuis staged a sit-in outside his monastery to protest his arrest. Released in July 2003, he spent a few brief months of "freedom" before being arrested again on 9 October in the crack-down on the UBCV. Thich Quang Do is also accused of "*possessing state secrets*", which carries a very heavy sentence in Vietnam. He is detained *incommunicado* at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Ho Chi Minh City. He suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure and a heart condition, and is currently in very poor health.

- Venerable **THICH THIEN MINH** (Huynh Van Ba), 50, Buddhist monk, member of the

UBCV, is serving a double life sentence in Z30A Camp in Xuan Loc, Dong Nai Province. Arrested and condemned to life imprisonment in 1979 for his support of the UBCV, he was sentenced to a second life sentence in 1986 after he tried to escape from the camp. He has spent long periods in solitary confinement because of his protests against ill-treatment of fellow inmates. In 2002, he was detained for three months in a solitary confinement cell. Thich Thien Minh was declared a victim of arbitrary detention by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (*Opinion 21/1997, 2 December 1997*).

- **PHAM QUE DUONG**, 73, former editor of the *"Military History Journal"*, respected military historian and former colonel in the People's Army. In 1999, Pham Que Duong turned in his Party card in protest against the expulsion from the Party of VCP dissident **Tran Do**. In September 2001, along with Tran Khue and other dissidents, he applied to set up an independent Anti-corruption Association in response to a government anti-corruption drive. The men were all placed under house arrest and subjected to strict Police surveillance. A Buddhist, Pham Que Duong assisted monks at Hanoi's One-pillar Pagoda to resist expulsion by the authorities in 2000. In August 2002, Pham Que Duong, Tran Khue, Hoang Minh Chinh signed a Petition of 21 Hanoi dissidents calling for the creation of a Constitutional Court and the respect of human rights. Pham Que Duong also applied to run for the 2002 National Assembly elections, but his candidature was rejected. He was arrested on 28 December 2003 in Ho Chi Minh City during a visit to dissident Tran Khue. Charged with *"abusing democratic freedoms"*, Pham Que Duong was sentenced to 19 months in prison on 9 July 2004 and released in August 2004. He is now under strict surveillance at his home in Hanoi.

- **Dr NGUYEN DAN QUE**, 62, an endocrinologist, was arrested in 1990 and sentenced to 20 years hard labour in November 1991 for founding the "High Tide Humanist Movement" and circulating a petition advocating peaceful democratic reform. He had already spent several years in re-education camp. Dr. Que was released in a 1998 government Amnesty on condition that he leave the country. However, after leaving prison, he refused to emigrate, and remained at his home in Ho Chi Minh City, where he continued his peaceful advocacy of democracy and human rights, despite continuous harassments and tight surveillance by Security Police. On 17 March 2003, Dr. Que was arrested for sending documents overseas calling for human rights, press freedom and political reforms. He was sentenced to 30 months in prison at an unfair trial in Ho Chi Minh City in July 2004 on charges of *"abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State"* (Article 258 of the Vietnamese Criminal Code). Dr. Que is currently detained at the B34 Detention Centre at 237 Nguyen Van Cu Street in Ho Chi Minh City.

- **HOANG MINH CHINH** (Tran Ngoc Nghiem), former Dean of the Hanoi Institute of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, spent almost 20 years in prison and under house arrest without charge for alleged *"anti-Party revisionism"*. In 1995, Hoang Minh Chinh was

arrested again and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment on charges of “*abusing democratic rights and freedoms*” and “*anti-socialist propaganda*”. On his release, he continued to call for Party reforms. As a result, his movements are restricted and his communications closely monitored. He is continuously summoned for “working sessions” (interrogations) by the Police, and the authorities have organized public “denunciation sessions” to criticize him.

- **TRAN KHUE**, 68, a scholar and professor at the Ho Chi Minh City University. Co-author of several books including “*Dialogue 2000*” and “*Dialogue 2001*” which are currently banned by the Government. Tran Khue was sentenced to 2 years administrative detention in October 2001 (under Decree 31/CP) for applying to set up an anti-corruption association with Colonel Pham Que Duong and other dissidents. Despite this, in February 2002, he sent an Open Letter to Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin during his visit to Vietnam protesting the Sino-Vietnamese border treaties. Tran Khue was arrested again in December 2003 and sentenced to 19 months in prison on 14 July 2004 on charges of “abusing democratic freedoms”. He was released in August 2004 and is now held under close surveillance at home in Ho Chi Minh City.

- **NGUYEN KHAC TOAN**, 49, a former officer in the North Vietnamese Army and businessman. He was arrested at an Internet cafe in Hanoi on 8 January 2002, he was charged with “*espionage*” and sentenced to 12 years in prison and 3 years administrative detention by the People’s Court in Hanoi on 20 December 2002. During the widespread demonstrations by farmers and peasants protesting State-confiscation of land, Nguyen Khac Toan had helped farmers to draft petitions and complaints to the authorities. He sent several of these complaints and other articles to organizations overseas. He is currently detained in the notorious B14 Prison (Thanh Liet) near Hanoi.

- **NGUYEN VU BINH**, 35, a former columnist for “*Tap Chi Cong San*”, the official Communist Party Review. He left the paper to form an independent political party (Liberal Democratic Party) in 2000, then joined with Pham Que Duong and other dissidents in attempting to form the Anti-corruption association. He also signed the Petition of 21 Hanoi dissidents in August 2002, and as a result was subjected to continuous harassment and interrogations. He was arrested on 25 September 2002 for sending a written testimony to a U.S. Congressional Hearing on human rights violations in Vietnam and writing other articles perceived to “*slander the Vietnamese State*”. On 31 December 2003, he was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment for “*espionage*” (Article 80 of the Criminal Code).

- **PHAM HONG SON**, 36, manager of a pharmaceutical company, is one of Vietnam’s first “cyber-dissidents”. He was arrested on 25 March 2002 in Hanoi for posting pro-democracy articles on the Internet. These included “*What is Democracy*”, and other articles downloaded from the US Embassy’s website in Hanoi. Pham Hong Son

translated these articles into Vietnamese and sent them to VCP Secretary Nong Duc Manh and several State-run newspapers for publication. Accused of “*espionage*”, he was sentenced to 13 years in prison and 3 years administrative detention at an unfair trial on 18 June 2003. As a result of strong international pressure, on 26 August 2003, his sentence was on appeal to 5 years imprisonment.

- **JANA BOM**, 45, a Montagnard Christian preacher from the Bahnar tribe. He was arrested in February 2001 during the 2001 demonstrations of indigenous tribes-people in the Central Highlands and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and 5 years probationary detention at a one-day trial on 26 September 2001 by the Gia Lai Provincial People’s Court. Thirteen other Montagnards were sentenced on the same day by the People’s Courts of Gia Lai and Dak Lak to sentences ranging from 6-12 years. Jana Bom was charged with offences such as “*attempting to break national unity*”, and accused of being the leader of “*civil unrest*” in the February 2001 demonstrations. The government’s repression of Montagnard demonstrations in February 2001 and April (Easter) 2004 have led to dozens of deaths, hundreds of wounded, and thousands of people being forced to go into hiding or seek political asylum in Cambodia. According to international human rights organizations who directly interviewed the victims, the Montagnards were simply calling for 1) freedom of religion ; 2) return of ancestral lands ; 3) release of Montagnard political prisoners ; 4) an end to all other human rights abuses.

- **NGUYEN DINH HUY**, 68, is serving 15 years in prison on charges of “*attempting to overthrow the people’s government*”. A former teacher of history and English, President of the “*Movement to Unite the People and Build Democracy*”, Nguyen Dinh Huy was arrested along with 11 members of the movement in November 1993 for seeking to organize a conference on development and democracy in Vietnam at a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City. He is detained in Z30A Reeducation Camp in Xuan Loc district, Dong Nai.

- **TRAN VAN LUONG**, 62, a former Deputy in the National Assembly of the Republic of (South) Vietnam, he was arrested on 9 December 1985 and sentenced to death on 21-22.9.88 for distributing human rights leaflets in the street. He was charged with “*attempting to overthrow the people’s government*”. His sentence was commuted to life imprisonment following an international campaign launched by the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights. Tran Van Luong is in very poor health. He is detained in T 5 Reeducation Camp in Thanh Cam District in the province of Thanh Hoa. (northern Vietnam).

- **VU DINH THUY**, 52, a poet, detained for “*reeducation*” in 1975, he was condemned to life imprisonment in 1979 at an unfair trial held inside the prison, on charges of “*writing poetry under detention*”. He is in T 5 Reeducation Camp in Thanh Cam District

in Thanh Hoa, and is in very poor health as a result of harsh detention conditions.

- Reverend **NGUYEN HONG QUANG**, secretary-general of the banned Vietnamese Evangelical Mennonite Church, 45, was arrested on 8 June 2004 in Ho Chi Minh City. He has reportedly been charged with *“inciting people to obstruct officials from carrying out their duties”*. Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang had held a sit-in in December 2003 at a Police station in Ho Chi Minh City along with other church leaders to protest the detention of 19 Christians for distributing religious pamphlets at the SEA Games in Ho Chi Minh City. He had previously been beaten by Security Police for running projects to help the poor and destitute and repeatedly threatened to cease his activities. He is currently awaiting trial. According to some sources, he may stand trial in September 2004.

[Back](#)