

## **AFP : Vietnam refuses visa for Norwegian rights activist**

Agence France Presse

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HANOI, 14 February 2007 (AFP) - Vietnam has refused to issue a visa to the head of a human rights foundation who wanted to visit the communist state to give its annual prize to a Buddhist monk, according to activists.

Arne Liljedahl Lynngard, chairman of the Rafto Foundation, planned to travel to Vietnam in early March to visit Thich Quang Do, a 77-year-old monk who has been under house arrest for more than two decades.

But the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights said Lynngard received a letter last week from the Vietnamese embassy in Copenhagen "informing him that a long-planned visit to Saigon" to see Do "is not possible".

Do, deputy leader of the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, was in September awarded Rafto's annual prize for his work in promoting democracy and freedom of expression.

But he elected not to apply to travel to Norway late last year to receive the prize, as he feared Vietnamese authorities would not allow him to return home.

The Rafto Foundation said it chose to honour Do, a monk, researcher and author, because he had "devoted his life to the advancement of justice and the Buddhist tradition of non-violence, tolerance and compassion".

The foundation -- named after Norwegian Professor Thorolf Rafto, who spent most of his life fighting for human rights -- created the prize in 1986.

**Quê Me**

Quê Me: Action for democracy in Vietnam & Vietnam Committee on Human Rights

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Four past recipients of the Rafto -- Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, Jose Ramos-Horta of East Timor, South Korea's Kim Dae-Jung and Iranian lawyer Shirin Ebadi -- have gone on to win the Nobel Peace Prize.