

Ambassador Nguyen Hong Cuong

Your Excellency

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the imprisoned lawyer Mr Nguyen Van Dai. Mr Nguyen was arrested on 16 December 2015 and charged with 'spreading propaganda against the state' under Article 88 of the Vietnamese penal code. Since then, he has been detained without trial and without contact with his lawyer. On 30 July 2017, we learned that he is additionally charged with 'carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration' under Article 79 of the Vietnamese penal code. If deemed guilty, he may face 12-20 years of imprisonment, life sentence or capital punishment.

I am worried that Mr Nguyen is detained solely because he is a vocal champion for religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam. As a lawyer and activist, he has provided legal advice and representation to Christians who have suffered violations of their right to freedom of religion or belief, as well as other victims of human rights violations. Previously, Mr Nguyen has also served four years in prison and another four years in house arrest under the charge of 'spreading propaganda against the state'. Yet he has not committed any crime and represents no threat to the Vietnamese government.

The detention of Mr Nguyen Van Dai is a violation of his right to protection from arbitrary or unlawful detention and arrest, as stipulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam has acceded. Under this covenant, Mr Nguyen also has the right to challenge the lawfulness of his detention before a court, and as the grounds for his imprisonment are unfounded he shall be released.

I therefore urge the Vietnamese authorities to:

- Ensure that Mr Nguyen Van Dai's basic human rights and freedoms are protected, and that he is given access to his lawyer.
- Immediately acquit and release Mr Nguyen Van Dai.
- Protect human rights defenders in Vietnam from harassment, attacks, arbitrary arrests and baseless charges.
- Respect and ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief and other human rights in Vietnam.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. I thank you in advance for using your influence as an ambassador and conveying this message to the relevant authorities in your home country.

Sincerely