

14 April 2014: **Viet Nam: Prisoners of conscience released but dozens remain jailed**



Vietnamese activist Nguyen Tien Trung was one of the prisoners of conscience released this week. © Private. "We are delighted that these men are out of prison but they should never have been locked-up in the first place." Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia-Pacific Director.

The early release in Viet Nam of several prisoners of conscience is welcome, but serves to highlight the situation of at least 70 others who remain jailed for peacefully expressing their opinions, Amnesty International said today.

Nguyen Tien Trung, Vi Duc Hoi and Cu Huy Ha Vu have all been released over the past week.

"We are delighted that these men are out of prison but they should never have been locked-up in the first place," said Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia-Pacific Director.

"The releases are a step in the right direction for freedom of expression and we hope that they reflect a shift in Viet Nam's commitment to respecting human rights."

Amnesty International has documented the cases of 75 individuals who have been imprisoned after being tried and convicted for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, and raised some of these cases in a recent visit to Viet Nam.

The cases, including the three men released, were included in the report [*Silenced Voices: Prisoners of Conscience in Viet Nam*](#). The document charts the harsh conditions faced by prisoners of conscience, many of whom suffer unfair trials, degrading treatment and ill-treatment in detention.

Nguyen Tien Trung: The most recent release came over the weekend, when Nguyen Tien Trung, aged 30, was freed after more than four years in prison. The IT engineer, blogger and pro-democracy activist had been found guilty in 2010 of attempting to "overthrow the people's administration".

The charges were brought after Nguyen Tien Trung and some friends set up an activist group while studying abroad in France. The group, called "The Assembly of Vietnamese Youth for Democracy", was founded to encourage young Vietnamese people in the country and abroad to call for political reform and democracy.

At his trial the judges deliberated for only 15 minutes before returning with the final decision. It then took 45 minutes for the judges to read the judgment, strongly suggesting that it had been prepared in advance of the hearing. He was sentenced to seven years in prison followed by three years under house arrest.

Nguyen Tien Trung was not due for release until January 2017 and his release on Saturday came as a surprise to campaigners and his family. His co-defendant Tran Huynh Duy Thuc, who Amnesty International also considers a prisoner of conscience, is still serving a 16-year sentence.

Vi Duc Hoi: Vi Duc Hoi, 56, was released on Friday 11 April, nearly a year-and-a-half earlier than expected.

Vi Duc Hoi is a writer and former member of Viet Nam's ruling Communist Party. He was expelled from the party in 2007 for calling for democratic reform and then arrested in 2010 and jailed for eight years for using the internet to promote democracy. This sentence was reduced to five years on appeal.

Cu Huy Ha Vu: Last week, one of Vietnam's most famous dissidents, human rights lawyer Cu Huy Ha Vu, 56, was released, three years into a seven-year prison sentence. He immediately travelled to the US, where he will live in voluntary exile.

Dinh Dang Dinh: However, jubilation over those released is marred by the tragic death of another prisoner of conscience, [Dinh Dang Dinh](#), earlier this month. The 50-year old activist was unjustly jailed in 2011 after starting a petition against a mining project. He was diagnosed with stomach cancer while in prison and was only released a month before his death.

Amnesty International is calling on Viet Nam's government to free all those who remain imprisoned for speaking out.

"The authorities should build on this positive step by immediately and unconditionally releasing all prisoners of conscience who still languish in prison simply for peacefully expressing their opinion," said Rupert Abbott.

Background: [Death of activist Dinh Dang Dinh should be 'wake-up call' for Viet Nam](#), News Story, 4 April 2014.

[Silenced Voices: Prisoners of Conscience in Viet Nam](#), Report, 7 November 2013.