

**Public**

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To: Health Professional Network  
From: Health and Human Rights Team  
Date: 27 February 2007

### **Health Professional Action**

**Nguyen Vu Binh**

**Socialist Republic of Viet Nam**

( For more information see ASA 41/008/2006, 22 October 2006; and ASA 41/009/2006, 20 October 2006)

#### **Summary:**

Nguyen Vu Binh, a 39-year-old journalist and writer imprisoned for over four years in Ba Sao prison camp in Nam Ha province in northern Viet Nam, is in need of urgent medical treatment. He is suffering from chronic hypertension and intestinal inflammation and during a recent doctor's visit, was diagnosed with steatosis (the presence of abnormal levels of fat within cells). On 4 February, Nguyen Vu Binh suffered a bout of severe chest pain and had to be given emergency treatment by a doctor. Nguyen Vu Binh's request to be sent to the hospital for a check up was denied. This followed previous requests for hospital treatment that were also refused. According to a family member who visited Nguyen Vu Binh on 15 February, he has lost a lot of weight, is having difficulty walking, has started to slur his speech, and is very weak.

#### **Background:**

Nguyen Vu Binh was arrested on 25 September 2002 and held incommunicado until his trial on 31 December 2003 where he was charged with having 'communicated via e-mails' with 'reactionary' organisations overseas, and having disseminated information about human rights in Viet Nam. After a hearing that lasted only three hours, he was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for 'spying', under Article 80 of the Criminal Code. On his release he is required by his sentence to serve a further three years "house arrest". The sentence was

upheld on appeal on 5 May 2004, following which Nguyen Vu Binh went on a hunger-strike for two weeks in protest.

Nguyen Vu Binh was amongst several dissidents who attempted to form an anti-corruption association in 2001. He was briefly detained in July 2002 after he submitted a written testimony to the United States Congress that discussed the human rights situation in Viet Nam. In that testimony Nguyen Vu Binh described how dissidents were harassed and arrested, stating that, “The Vietnamese authorities have violated human rights on a frequent, continuous, and systematic basis.”

Viet Nam has passed a string of laws in recent years attempting to limit the opportunity for freedom of expression on the Internet as well as automated filtering and blocking technology, and there is a dedicated police force monitoring and controlling Internet use. AI considers Nguyen Vu Binh to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and association.

It is reported that Nguyen Vu Binh receives regular punishment for refusing to sign a “confession”. He is held in isolation without being allowed to leave his cell like other prisoners. His health is reported to have deteriorated and, contrary to guidelines outlined in the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Nguyen Vu Binh has been denied adequate medical care. In a public appeal by Nguyen Vu Binh relayed by his wife on 16 February, he tells of how he has been experiencing back and chest pain as well as difficulty breathing. Furthermore he relates how on a visit to the Nam Ha Clinic, several of his symptoms, including constant tiredness, difficulty breathing and pain in his chest, were overlooked by doctors. In his appeal Nguyen Vu Binh requests that the authorities ‘*allow me to be released to my family so I can have a decent medical treatment. While waiting to be released, I requested to be medically checked at National Cardiology Institute, accompanied by my wife. I fear that with further delay my heart symptoms will rapidly worsen and I will not wake up the next time I pass out.*’

### **Recommended action**

- Explain that you are a health professional and are writing about the case of Nguyen Vu Binh, imprisoned in Ba Sao prison camp.
- Express concern about reports of the deteriorating health of Nguyen Vu Binh and urge the Vietnamese authorities to provide him with appropriate medical treatment immediately, including transfer to hospital.
- Call for the immediate and unconditional release of Nguyen Vu Binh who has been imprisoned, as a prisoner of conscience, for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

### **Addresses**

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Please also write to diplomatic representatives of Viet Nam accredited to your country.

If you receive no reply within six weeks of sending your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response.

Please inform your section or structure and the Health and Human Rights team at the IS, if you take action in this case, and of any replies you receive.