

Web Action WA 12/03 ; AI Index ASA 41/038/2003

For publication 26/11/03; to translation 17/11/03

[comments for translators in square brackets – do not translate these]

[Translators: this action is adapted from a feature in The Wire, December 2003 NWS 21/011/2003. See also **Viet Nam: Freedom of expression under threat in cyberspace** (ASA 41/037/2003) – although this hasn't been sent for translation yet, as far as I know]

[Action Title]

Viet Nam:

Help free Le Chi Quang, imprisoned for internet use

[Action text]

Le Chi Quang, a 33-year-old law graduate and computer teacher, was arrested in an internet café in Ha Noi in February 2002.

According to the official charge sheet, the police “caught Le Chi Quang red-handed when he was on the internet... sending emails abroad.” He was accused of writing and distributing anti-government articles, referring to issues such as human rights violations, democracy and the Vietnamese government’s foreign policy.

Before his arrest Le Chi Quang had circulated via the internet information condemning the government’s border agreement with China – a sensitive issue which has come under unprecedented internal criticism from dissidents and others. In November 2002 he was sentenced to four years’ imprisonment and three years’ house arrest on a charge of “propaganda against the State”. Le Chi Quang suffers from chronic kidney disease and his health has seriously deteriorated since he has been in prison.

It is not just Le Chi Quang who is suffering because of restrictions on freedom of expression on the internet in Vietnam. In the last two years, five other dissidents have been sentenced to long prison terms and at least four more are awaiting trial for similar offences.

Restrictions on the freedom of expression in Viet Nam must end now. Le Chi Quang and all those imprisoned under the country's draconian national security legislation must be released immediately.

[Link]

Freedom of expression under threat in cyberspace: further information

[Take action]

Take action

Write to the Prime Minister of Viet Nam, asking for the release of Le Chi Quang and all those held for the non-violent expression of their political views in Viet Nam. You could use the letter below as a guide.

[Letter]

Your Excellency

I heard today the story of Le Chi Quang, a 33-year-old law graduate and computer teacher, who was arrested in an internet café in Ha Noi in February 2002.

He is now serving a four-year prison sentence just because of the non-violent expression of his political opinions. He suffers from chronic kidney disease, and his health has seriously deteriorated since he has been in prison.

Le Chi Quang, and at least five others like him, have been imprisoned under national security legislation which is being used to criminalise peaceful political dissent and freedom of expression in your country. At least four other people are awaiting trial for offences which seem to be connected with their use of the internet.

I call on you to secure the immediate and unconditional release of Le Chi Quang and other prisoners of conscience, and to arrange for Le Chi Quang to receive the appropriate medical care he urgently needs.

I urge you to guarantee the right to freedom of expression for all citizens of Viet Nam.

Yours

[Appeals to]

Appeals to:

His Excellency Prime Minister Phan Van Khai

Office of the Prime Minister

Hoang Hoa Tham

Ha Noi

Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Fax: +844 823 4137 / +844 199 2682 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs – please mark all appeals "for the attention of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai")

Email: There is no means at present of sending email appeals to the Vietnamese authorities. Please send letters or faxes instead.

[Background article]

[title]

Viet Nam: Freedom of expression under threat in cyberspace

[text]

The internet has provided for many Vietnamese people a new and exciting means of exchanging views and information. It has also, however, provided their government with a new tool for repression.

The internet café has become a familiar sight on street corners in towns and cities across Viet Nam. Cafés are often packed with people playing multi-user games, surfing the net, chatting, drinking coffee or writing emails. By August 2003, the number of internet users was estimated to be approaching two and a half million, with some 4-5,000 Internet cafés.

Among the people for whom the internet has made communication easier are those who would like to express their dissenting views and political opinions. Vietnamese living overseas can be contacted through email, discussion forums and websites. People inside Viet Nam who want to disseminate information critical of their government and its policies can do so with ease.

Unfortunately, the Vietnamese authorities seem to have found it equally easy to monitor the activities of these internal critics, to track their electronic 'footsteps', and to punish them. Viet Nam's loosely-worded national security legislation offers ample opportunities for prosecution, as do the increasing number of "decrees" governing use of the Internet.

As a result, in Viet Nam the rights to freedom of expression, information and peaceful assembly are even more compromised in cyberspace than they are in the 'real world'.

In the last two years, six dissidents have been sentenced to long prison terms and at least four more are awaiting trial for offences linked to the sharing of information on the Internet deemed critical of the government.

Advocates of political reform continue to risk long prison sentences on national security grounds, simply for expressing their peaceful political views via the Internet. The rights to freedom of expression, information and peaceful assembly remain vulnerable to attack by those in power, whatever the medium of publication.

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all those imprisoned in Viet Nam for the peaceful expression of their political opinion, and for the Vietnamese government to ensure that national security legislation complies with international human rights laws which Viet Nam has signed up to and is not used to criminalize peaceful political dissent.

[further info link]

For further information, see **Viet Nam: Freedom of expression under threat in cyberspace** (ASA 41/037/2003)

[take action link]

Take action: **Help free Le Chi Quang, imprisoned for internet use**

[CASE EXAMPLES]

Businessman Nguyen Khac Toan, 48, was arrested in January 2002 for passing information via the internet to overseas Vietnamese activist groups about demonstrations and protests in Ha Noi by farmers complaining about corruption and land confiscation. He was convicted of espionage in a trial that lasted less than a day, and was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment plus three years house arrest.

Journalist and writer Nguyen Vu Binh, 35, has not been seen by his family or lawyer since his arrest in September 2002 and the exact charges against him are not known. He is currently awaiting trial. He is an advocate of peaceful political reform who, one month before his arrest, criticized a controversial border treaty with China in an article which was distributed on the internet.

[TEXT FOR PUBLICITY PAGE]

[The following text is meant to be the same as a computer error message, like the ones you get in Windows. When you translate please use the appropriate wording for your language's version of a Microsoft product. The English version is here:

<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;175703>. If you would like more details then please contact Graham Francis on 020 7413 5718 and I will fax you through a mock-up]

[Warning]

You have performed an illegal operation and will be shut down.

[Close button]

Close

[Details button]

Details

[Strapline]

Arrested while using an internet café.

//END