

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 41/001/2009

23 January 2009

UA 18/09 Torture/ill-treatment/ health concern

VIET NAM Vu Hung (m), teacher

Vu Hung, a teacher held in pre-trial detention since 18 September 2008, has not been seen since he was moved from his cell in B14 prison, Ha Noi, two months ago. His health had deteriorated after reportedly being beaten during several interrogation sessions, and starting a hunger-strike in protest at his treatment. During that time he was taken to Hospital 198 of the Ministry of Public Security a number of times.

Vu Hung had been held in a cell with 50 prisoners convicted of criminal offences, a number of whom were recently released under an amnesty for Tet, the Vietnamese lunar new year festival. Some of these released prisoners reported that Vu Hung's health had seriously deteriorated, and that it was not known where he had been moved to. About a month after he was taken into custody, police visited his family, asking them to sign an affidavit that he was suffering from mental health problems, raising concerns about his treatment in prison and state of health.

Vu Hung is one of at least nine people arrested in September 2008, following the trial of blogger and activist Dieu Cay, and in connection with planned peaceful protests over a territory dispute with China. Amnesty International believes that they were arrested solely for their peaceful activism. Vu Hung was also one of 14 people arrested in April 2008 during peaceful demonstrations against Chinese policies as the Olympic torch relay passed through Ho Chi Minh City. He was then beaten by police before being released.

A high school physics teacher married with two young children, Vu Hung was reportedly dismissed from his job in July 2008 for his involvement with other pro-democracy activists, protesting against government policies since 2006. He was also frequently interrogated by the police.

According to human rights activists in Viet Nam, the nine arrested in September, including Vu Hung, have been charged under Article 88 of the Penal Code, with "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Freedom of expression and association has been subject to strict control by the Vietnamese authorities for many years. Dissidents who are critical of government policies and speak out about human rights violations face a range of sanctions to silence them. These include surveillance by local police, restrictions on movement, interference with home utilities such as phone lines and internet access, arbitrary questioning and detention by police, arrest and imprisonment. There are also cases where authorities have used arbitrary detention in mental health institutions against outspoken critics and activists.

At least 30 dissidents have been handed down long prison sentences, since the most recent wave of arrests began in 2006 after a short-lived period of tolerance to increased web-based activism challenging the government. An unknown number of others are held in pre-trial detention.

Provisions in the national security section of the Penal Code are used arbitrarily to stifle and criminalize peaceful dissent, in breach of international human rights treaties that Viet Nam has ratified. Restrictions and regulations on internet use penalize freedom of expression on topics deemed sensitive, including human

rights and advocacy of democracy. Recent regulations on blogging enacted in December 2008 restrict content to personal matters, and prohibit dissemination of anti-government material, and “undermining national security”.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Vietnamese, French or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest of Vu Hung and eight others in September 2008 for their peaceful activism;
- calling on the authorities to reveal his whereabouts and current state of health immediately;
- calling for an investigation into allegations that Vu Hung has been tortured and ill-treated in detention, with the results made public and anyone found responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Vu Hung is provided with proper medical treatment and hospitalization if necessary, and that he is allowed access to his family, and to a lawyer;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Vu Hung.

APPEALS TO:

Le Hong Anh
Minister of Public Security
Ministry of Public Security
44 Yet Kieu Street
Ha Noi
VIET NAM
Fax: + 8443 942 0223
Salutation: Dear Minister

Ha Hung Cuong
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
58-60 Tran Phu Street
Ha Noi
VIET NAM
Fax: + 8443 843 1431
Salutation: Dear Minister

Pham Gia Khiem
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
1 Ton That Dam Street
Ba Dinh district, Ha Noi
VIET NAM
Fax: + 8443 823 1872
Email: <mailto:bc.mfa@mofa.gov.vn>
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Viet Nam accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 March 2009.