



FREEDOM NOW

1750 K St. NW, Ste. 350, Washington DC 20006 • 202 223-3733 • www.freedom-now.org

MEDIA RELEASE

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Contact: Maran Turner
+1 (646) 596-5064

March 15, 2010

FATHER NGUYEN VAN LY RELEASED FROM PRISON IN VIETNAM

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The Government of Vietnam released prisoner of conscience and Freedom Now client Father Nguyen Van Ly at 4:00AM on Monday, March 15, 2010.

In response to the news of his release, Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner says: "I could not be happier that Father Ly has been released finally after three years of unlawful imprisonment in solitary confinement. I am especially relieved that following two strokes, Father Ly can now be with his loved ones and receive consistent medical care."

Father Nguyen Van Ly, a Catholic priest and prominent human rights activist, has advocated for religious freedom, open media, and democracy in Vietnam for more than thirty years. For his efforts, Father Ly has suffered repeated harassment by the Vietnamese government and has spent more than 15 years in prison since 1977. On March 30, 2007, he was convicted of disseminating anti-government propaganda and sentenced to 8 years in prison and 5 years of house arrest after a four-hour trial in which he was physically restrained, gagged, and prohibited from putting forth a defense. Father Ly was placed in solitary confinement and was permitted limited family visits.

Father Ly's health has declined substantially since his imprisonment began. He suffered a stroke in July 2009. Then on November 14, 2009, he was found unconscious on the floor of his cell, having gone unnoticed for an unknown amount of time. The combined effect of the two strokes has left him partially paralyzed and in need of regular medical attention.

Freedom Now, a legal advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. represented Father Nguyen Van Ly as international legal counsel and acted on his behalf since 2008. On February 27, 2009, Freedom Now filed a petition with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention seeking a declaration that Father Ly's arrest, trial, and detention violated international law. The Working Group was expected to issue an opinion in May.

On July 1, 2009, a bipartisan group of 37 members of the United States Senate, led by Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) working with Freedom Now, requested President Nguyễn Minh Triết to release Father Ly, noting "serious flaws in relation to [Father Ly's] arrest, trial, and imprisonment."

Father Ly is in fair health and is with his family in his hometown of Huế.

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