



11.29.2010

VIETNAM CSW calls for release of pastors given harsh prison sentences in Vietnam

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for the release of Pastors Ksor Y Du and Kpa Y Co, who were found guilty of “undermining national unity” in a trial on November 15 in Vietnam, which did not follow due procedure under Vietnamese or international law.

The two Pastors from the Ede ethnic group were sentenced at the trial in Phu Yen province. Pastor Ksor Y Du was given six years, with four years house arrest, while Pastor Kpa Y Co was given four years, with two years house arrest. The men belong to the Vietnam Good News Mission (VGM), a denomination not recognized by the Vietnamese government. Vietnamese legislation contains provision for groups of all denominations (recognized or unrecognized) to register with the government. However, applications submitted by VGM in the Central Highlands are routinely rejected and their members are pressured to join the officially recognized Evangelical Church of Vietnam – South (ECVN-S).

The pair was arrested at their homes in Song Hinh District of Phu Yen province on 27 January. Contrary to Vietnamese law, arrest papers were not given to the families, nor were they formally charged for ten months. Both reported ill-treatment in detention and at the time of arrest.

It is suspected that the pair have been targeted due to a widely-held erroneous suspicion among officials that VGM activity in Phu Yen is used as a cover for separatist activities. After the arrests, Pastor Y Du’s wife, Mrs A Le H’Gioi was visited at home by a Party official in charge of Protestantism in the region, who pressured her to renounce her faith in exchange for her husband’s freedom, a new house and a sack of rice each month.

Mrs. A Le H’Gioi reported that the presiding judge at the trial addressed the matter of their faith directly, asking Pastor Y Du, “Do you still insist on following the religion?” and, “After serving in prison already do you still insist on staying with the denomination?” Pastor Y Du replied saying he would not give up his faith, even if it meant death.

CSW’s Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “CSW calls upon the Vietnamese government to respect the rights of all Vietnamese to religious freedom by releasing Pastor Y Du and Pastor Y Co, whose cases did not follow due procedure in domestic or international law. The Vietnamese government is urged to respect the rights of all its citizens to belong to religious groups of their choosing.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The Vietnamese Phap Luat Newspaper reported on November 16 that evidence presented at the trial showed that Pastor Y Du had made 58 phone calls to the US. This was used as evidence that he had connections with overseas separatist groups and was involved in inciting others to join the illegal ‘Dega’ church. Pastor Y Du admitted calling a relative in the US three times to ask for financial assistance to purchase medicine and make repairs to the family’s house.
2. Pastor Y Du previously spent four years in prison and one year’s house arrest for his involvement in the 2004 demonstrations against religious oppression and land seizures in the Central Highland area, when he was caught trying to flee the military crackdown by crossing into Cambodia.