



2.11.2011

VIETNAM Catholic priest threatens hunger strike if returned to prison

Father Nguyen Van Ly, a Catholic priest and prominent human rights activist, has threatened to go on hunger strike if Vietnamese authorities send him back to prison on March 15.

In a statement on 2 February, Father Nguyen Van Ly said he would go on indefinite hunger strike and refuse medical treatment if sent back to prison. Catholic News Asia reported that the statement was passed to visitors who went to see Father Ly at the Tet New Year holiday.

He was released from prison in Hanoi on one year's medical parole in March 2010, following advocacy efforts from US-based legal advocacy group, Freedom Now. The sixty-four year old Priest had previously spent three years in solitary confinement and suffered two strokes in prison, leaving him partially paralyzed. Since his release Father Ly has received medical treatment in the coastal city of Hue. He has been prevented from giving interviews or meeting with fellow activists. In January 2011 a diplomat from the US Embassy in Hanoi who attempted to visit Father Ly was roughed up by police.

Father Ly has been a prominent human rights' defender since the 1970s, campaigning for religious freedom, democracy and free media reporting. He is a prominent supporter of the Vietnamese democracy movement, Bloc 8406 and his outspoken work has resulted in him spending more than 15 years in prison in total. He was sentenced to eight years in prison and five years house arrest in March 2007 for "damaging national security". He was famously gagged to prevent him speaking at the trial.

Human rights activists are under huge pressure in Vietnam where there has been an increase in arrests and restrictions on freedom of expression in recent months.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW calls upon the Vietnamese authorities to allow Father Nguyen Van Ly his dignity by not re-imprisoning him when his year-long medical parole is up in March 2011. Father Nguyen Van Ly's work defending human rights has seen him imprisoned many times following trials that did not follow due process under Vietnamese or international law. His case is representative of the pressures facing democracy activists in the country."