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## VIETNAM CSW calls for release of Christian activists convicted of subversion

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Seven Vietnamese activists, including three Christians, have been convicted of subversion and given prison sentences of between two and eight years. Mennonites, Pastor Duong Kim Khai, Tran Thi Thuy and Nguyen Thanh Tam were active in peaceful campaigning for land rights and were convicted along with four others.

Tran Thi Thuy received eight years, Pastor Duong Kim Khai six years and Nguyen Thanh Tam a two-year sentence. The seven were denied access to legal representation at the trial, which took place under heavy security, and the outcome of which is thought to have been pre-determined. They were charged under Article 79 of the Criminal Law.

The three Christians are members of the unrecognized branch of the Mennonite church and attended the "Cow Shed Church" in Ho Chi Minh City. Inspired by their Christian faith, they worked assisting fellow Vietnamese citizens who lost farmland when it was forcibly sold by local government to large corporations, helping them to file complaint letters asking for adequate compensation. The three are also said to be members of Viet Tan, an overseas-based democracy party that calls for peaceful political reform.

Pastor Duong Kim Khai was held since August 10, 2010, having been detained in Ho Chi Minh City. Pastor Khai's disabled wife and then 17-year-old son were not given arrest papers or details of Pastor Khai's detention. Those close to the case told CSW that Pastor Khai is a gentle man who wanted to help others and speak up for injustice. Pastor Khai has previously served two years in prison on similar charges.

Human rights activists face increasing opposition from the State in Vietnam, where there is little tolerance for peaceful activism. CSW has seen an increase in arrests and harassment in recent months.

CSW's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "The seven activists, three of whom were inspired by their Christian faith, attempted to assist their fellow citizens by standing up for justice after the unfair seizing of land from poor farmers. CSW calls upon the Vietnamese authorities to respect the rights of its citizens to peaceful protest and not to sacrifice the rights of the poor for economic development."

### Notes to Editors:

1. Vietnam requires legal registration of denominational groups; registration can only be granted following twenty years 'stable operation'. There are two branches of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam – one is registered and the other is not. The "Cow Shed Church" belongs to the unregistered branch.
2. The other four activists are Pham Van Thong, Nguyen Chi Thanh, Ms. Pham Ngoc Hoa and Cao Van Tinh.