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VIETNAM Father Ly arrested despite poor health

Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, a 65 year-old Catholic priest and prominent human rights activist, was arrested by Vietnamese authorities on July 25, ending one-year and four months of temporary medical parole.

Father Ly was arrested at 2:30 pm at his home in Hue, where he was receiving medical treatment after his release from prison in Hanoi on one year's medical parole in March 2010, following advocacy efforts from US-based legal advocacy group, Freedom Now. According to Freedom Now, Father Ly continues to be in very ill health, having suffered three strokes and been under medical care for a brain tumor.

His medical parole officially expired on March 15, when it was feared he would be returned to prison. Father Ly had previously spent three years in solitary confinement and suffered two strokes in prison, leaving him partially paralyzed. Since his release Father Ly 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 urges the Vietnamese authorities to consider freeing Father Nguyen Van Ly, who had been released specifically on grounds of ill-health and is still very unwell. 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, and this is no exception."