



4.24.13

VIETNAM | Christian Activist Blocked From Meeting U.S. Official

Christian lawyer and human rights defender Nguyen Van Dai has spoken out about being barred from meeting with U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Dan Baer on April 13, 2013, when he visited Vietnam for the 17th U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Baer was able to meet with a number of human rights defenders during his visit, including lawyers, bloggers and advocates. He was also able to meet with some religious leaders. In a statement, the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi said, "While Mr. Baer was able to meet well-known activist Father Nguyen Van Ly in prison, we were troubled that authorities prevented a private meeting with activists Nguyen Van Dai and Dr. Pham Hong Son as planned."

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi sent Mr. Dai an invitation to meet with Deputy Assistant Secretary Baer, but Mr. Dai says that on Fri., April 12, a security officer phoned him and told him not to go to the Metropol Hotel for the meeting. Mr. Dai then relayed this order to the Embassy, who confirmed that the deputy minister of the Vietnamese Public Security Ministry had agreed that Mr. Baer could meet any Vietnamese citizen.

On April 13, the Embassy told Mr. Dai that the Vietnamese authorities had allowed him to go to the meeting. However, on the same day over 20 security officers and police came and blocked the way to Mr. Dai's home. When a political officer from the Embassy tried to pick Mr. Dai up from his house that afternoon, security officers instructed 10 elderly women to block the officer's car. Unable to reach Mr. Dai's home, the officer had no option but to leave. According to Mr. Dai, approximately 10 of his supporters were arrested by security officers when they came to see what was happening. They were detained and questioned for five hours.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) said, "CSW is encouraged by Vietnam's stated commitment to an ongoing conversation on human rights both

inside and outside Vietnam-U.S. human rights dialogue, and by the broad range of Vietnamese activists who were able to meet with the US delegation. However, we are concerned that religious freedom advocate Nguyen Van Dai and businessman and activist Dr. Pham Hong Son were prevented from meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary Baer. Constructive dialogue depends on mutual trust. When the authorities say delegates are free to meet any Vietnamese citizen, they should follow through with that assurance.”