



10.4.13

## VIETNAM | Religious Leaders Petition for Release of Young Prisoners of Conscience

Vietnamese religious leaders have joined together to demand the immediate release of 14 Catholic and Protestant young people currently detained in connection with their “different political opinions.”

An [English-language version of the petition](#), dated Aug. 30, was posted on the website Vietnamese Redemptorist News on Oct. 2. The Redemptorists, a congregation within the Catholic Church, have been one of the most vocal groups calling for justice and human rights in Vietnam. However, it is significant that the petition is signed by clergy representing a number of religions in Vietnam, including Catholicism, Protestantism, Caodaism, Hoa Haoism and other variants of Buddhism.

The petition is addressed to members of the National Assembly of Vietnam, religious followers and officials, other governments, and various international institutions and organizations including the UN Human Rights Council. It calls on the Vietnamese government to immediately release the 14 young people and others who are currently detained. The petition also calls on the government to refrain from using torture against prisoners of conscience and to provide medical treatment to prisoners. The petition further asks the international community to supervise the implementation of human rights in Vietnam.

In recent months, Vietnam has come under criticism from international human rights groups and governments for its crackdown on freedom of expression and the peaceful discussion of human rights. A number of prominent activists have been arrested and detained. Most recently, on Oct. 2, Catholic lawyer and human rights activist Le Quoc Quan was sentenced to 30 months in prison on charges of tax evasion. Human rights groups believe the charges are politically motivated.

At the same time, the government has been cracking down on demonstrations by Catholics petitioning for land rights and the release of those detained without trial, as reported by Christian

Solidarity Worldwide in August and September.

CSW Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We welcome the religious leaders’ efforts to come together to call for the release of prisoners of conscience in Vietnam. The crackdown on freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression by the Vietnamese government affects not only those activists directly involved, but also has a negative impact on society as a whole by stifling discussions on human rights and the development of a peaceful, just society. We join these religious representatives in calling on the Vietnamese government to immediately release all religious and political prisoners of conscience in Vietnam. We further call on the government to protect and promote the rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam is a party.”