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## **VIETNAM | Police Officer Arrested in Church Elder's Death**

A police officer involved in the death in police custody of Vietnamese church elder Hoang Van Ngai on March 17, 2013 was arrested, apparently in connection with the case.

According to the Vietnamese media, the local authorities in Dak Nong Province are conducting an investigation into possible acts of "irresponsibility" by the police which may have had "serious consequences" which contributed to the death of Hoang Van Ngai. The officer arrested, Le Manh Nam, was the Deputy Chief of Police in the town where Hoang Van Ngai died.

Hoang Van Ngai was an elder of Bui Tre Church, which belongs to the legally recognized Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South). According to his relatives, Ngai defended the church when the authorities tried to force it to close, stood up against abuses of power and refused to pay bribes. On March 15, 2013, he and his brother Hoang Van Pa were arrested without formal documentation. Ngai's brother, who was detained in an adjacent room, heard the sound of violent beating just before his brother's limp body was removed from the cell on March 17. Photographs of Ngai's corpse show severe bruising which was not there before he was detained.

Ngai's family members rejected the police's explanation that Ngai had committed suicide and filed several complaints about his death. However, in mid-May 2013, after two months of petitioning, the authorities finally notified the family that their investigation had confirmed the original finding of suicide by self-electrocution.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The death of Hoang Van Ngai in police custody in March 2013 was a tragedy for his family, his church, and the community which loved and respected him. The authorities' failure to address the questions raised by Ngai's death casts serious doubt on the government's commitment to the protection of human rights in Vietnam. We hope that the arrest of this officer is a sign that the authorities are looking afresh at the case. We urge the authorities to take this opportunity to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into Ngai's death, and to hold to account those found to be responsible."