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VIETNAM | Father Ly Released

Father Nguyen Van Ly was granted an early release from prison May 20. Media outlets have reported the release as a goodwill gesture ahead of U.S. President Barack Obama's three-day visit to the country which started May 23.

Reportedly a number of human rights activists were detained this week in apparent attempts to prevent them from meeting the U.S. delegation. Most have been released.

Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, a 65-year-old Catholic priest and prominent human rights activist, has been campaigning for religious freedom, democracy and free media reporting since the 1970s and is a prominent supporter of the Vietnamese democracy movement, Bloc 8406. His work has resulted in him spending more than 15 years in prison.

In March 2007, Father Ly was sentenced to eight years imprisonment for "disseminating slanderous and libelous information" against the State. He was rearrested by the Vietnamese authorities in July 2011, ending one year and four months of temporary medical parole. He is partially paralyzed as a result of suffering several strokes and having a brain tumor. In September 2010, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called for Father Ly's immediate and unconditional release, saying he had been arbitrarily and illegally detained and denied access to legal counsel by the Vietnamese authorities.

CSW's Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas said, "While CSW welcomes the release of Father Ly from prison, we remain concerned about Vietnam's human rights record and mistreatment of human rights defenders such as Tran Thi Hong and lawyer Nguyen Van Dai. We urge President Obama to raise their cases and ongoing human rights concerns, including violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, with the government of Vietnam during his visit."