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VIETNAM | Lawyer Imprisoned 600 Days Without Trial

Activists in London, Dublin and Prague marked the 600th day of the unjust imprisonment of Vietnamese human rights lawyer, Nguyen Van Dai on Aug. 7 with a solidarity action consisting of 600 lines drawn in chalk on the path leading to the Vietnamese embassy in London, to mark 600 days of Nguyen Van Dai's detention without trial since December 2015, along with the hashtag #FreeNguyenVanDai. Solidarity actions were also performed by members of Van Lang in Prague and Front Line Defenders in Dublin.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW's) East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "CSW is deeply concerned that lawyer Nguyen Van Dai has been unjustly detained for over 18 months and that so little is known about his current condition, and how he has been treated in detention. Mr. Dai has been a vocal champion for religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam who has dedicated his life to securing justice and freedom for all. Rather than being branded a criminal, the government should recognize the positive role he has played in supporting and defending the most vulnerable in society. We call for his immediate release and urge the Vietnamese government to respect and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief and other human rights in Vietnam."

Nguyen Van Dai, a Christian, and his colleague, Le Thu Ha, were arrested Dec. 16, 2015 and subsequently charged with "spreading propaganda against the state" under Article 88 of the Vietnamese penal code. Since then, the two of them have been held in prison without trial and with limited contact with the outside world.

CSW recently learned that the charges against Dai and Ha have been changed to "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration" under Article 79 of the Vietnamese penal code. This carries possible penalties of 12-20 years imprisonment, a life sentence, or capital punishment.

On July 30, four other activists were arrested and also charged under Article 79. No trial date has been announced for any of these detainees, and CSW is concerned that they may also be subject to a lengthy detention without trial.