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VIETNAM | Organizations Call for Release of Prisoners

A joint initiative by 14 Vietnamese and international organizations, including Christian Solidarity Worldwide, is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience in Vietnam, including those detained in connection with their religion or belief.

The launch of the “NOW! Campaign” coincides with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum held Nov. 11-12. According to the campaign, as of November 2017, there are at least 165 prisoners of conscience in Vietnam. Due to the challenges of obtaining information about prisoners in the country, the real number is likely to be higher. The figure includes men and women who have been arrested for their political or religious beliefs.

Many of those on the list belong to independent religious communities not registered with the government, including Christians from ethnic minority groups. CSW continues to receive numerous reports of violations against such groups, in particular those located in remote parts of the country. Violations include harassment, forced evictions, beatings, torture, pressure to recant and detention or imprisonment. Those who advocate for freedom of religion or belief or for the rights of others generally receive the harshest treatment.

Information on prisoners of conscience in Vietnam is available on the NOW! Campaign [website](#). In addition to religious prisoners of conscience, other prisoners of conscience in Vietnam include bloggers, lawyers, trade unionists, land rights activists and political dissidents.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW welcomes this initiative calling for the release of all prisoners of conscience in Vietnam. Our research consistently finds that Christians and other religious communities in Vietnam continue to experience violations of their right to freedom of religion or belief. In particular, Christians from indigenous people groups suffer a double discrimination as both religious and ethnic minorities. In addition, a significant number of human rights defenders in Vietnam belong to religious communities. These individuals play a

vital role in promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief. We call on the Vietnamese government to release all prisoners of conscience in Vietnam, and to uphold the right to freedom of religion for all.”