

RAPID ACTION NETWORK

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Update #4 to RAN 01/04

VIETNAM: Writer Nguyen Vu Binh released under amnesty following international pressure

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN welcomes the release of leading dissident writer Nguyen Vu Binh on 10 June 2007, after serving four years of a seven-year prison on espionage charges for his critical writings. He was among three leading dissidents to be granted an amnesty by President Nguyen Minh Triet, two weeks ahead of his planned visit to the United States. Sustained international pressure from human rights organisations and US and European diplomats is thought to have contributed to his early release.

According to PEN's information, Nguyen Vu Binh, who is a leading member of the Democracy Club for Vietnam, was arrested on 25 September 2002 and sentenced by the Hanoi People's Court to seven years' imprisonment, to be followed by three years' house arrest, on charges of espionage in a three-hour trial on 31 December 2003. Following the proceedings, the official Vietnam news agency reported that he had been convicted of having "written and exchanged, with various opportunist elements in the country, information and materials that distorted the party and state policies." He was also accused of communicating with "reactionary" organisations abroad. His sentence was upheld on appeal on 5 May 2004. He was held at Ba Sao forced labour camp, in Nam Hà province, in very poor conditions and denied adequate medical care or nutrition. There have been serious concerns for his health, and PEN has campaigned for his release throughout his time in prison.

The 39-year old writer was targeted for the online publication of one of his critical essays, "Some Thoughts on the China-Vietnam Border Agreement". Nguyen Vu Binh is a former journalist who worked for 10 years for "Tap Chi Cong" ("Journal of Communism"), the official publication of the Communist Party of Vietnam. In January 2001, he left his post to form the independent Liberal Democratic Party, and is known for his critical writings calling for political reform.

Thank you to all who sent appeals on this case.