



PRESS RELEASE

VIET NAM: Detained human rights lawyer Le Cong Dinh is now facing charges of "attempting to overthrow the State"

Geneva-Paris-Dublin, December 23, 2009. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and Front Line express their deepest concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention of human rights lawyer Mr. Le Cong Dinh and the new charges of "attempting to overthrow the State" he is now facing.*

Recently, Mr. **Le Cong Dinh** was charged with "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration", under Article 79 of the Vietnamese Penal Code, and is now facing the death penalty if convicted on this charge. His trial is apparently due to take place in January 2010.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Front Line recall that Mr. Le Cong Dinh was arrested on June 13, 2009 by Public Security Police at his office in Ho Chi Minh City and later charged with "conducting propaganda" against the State, under Article 88 of the Vietnamese Penal Code.

Mr. Le Cong Dinh is a prominent human rights lawyer and the former Vice-President of the Ho Chi Minh City Bar Association. Shortly before his arrest, he had spoken out against the extraction of bauxite in the Central Highlands, and had also called for political reform in Viet Nam.

At a press conference following his arrest, the Investigation Agency of the Ministry of Public Security stated that Mr. Le Cong Dinh had "connived with overseas subversives to publish documents distorting the socio-economic policies" of the Government.

In August 2009, Mr. Le Cong Dinh was compelled to make a public "confession" broadcast on television.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Front Line believe that the arrest of Mr. Le Cong Dinh is directly related to his work in the defence of human rights, and are seriously concerned for his physical and psychological integrity while in detention.

Accordingly, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Front Line urge the Vietnamese authorities to guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Le Cong Dinh and to release him immediately and unconditionally since his detention is arbitrary as it only aims at sanctioning his human rights activities.

More generally, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Front Line call upon the Vietnamese authorities to put an end to any kind of harassment - including at the judicial level - against all human rights defenders in Viet Nam, in conformity with the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as well as with international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Viet Nam.

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