



# Amnesty International

Orange County

GROUP 141 ORANGE • GROUP 175 LONG BEACH  
GROUP 178 IRVINE • GROUP 596 HUNTINGTON BEACH

July 2004

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

## Viet Nam: Another Elderly Dissident to Be Brought to Trial

Yet another elderly dissident, an Amnesty International member, is to be brought to trial next week in Ho Chi Minh City. Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, 62, a distinguished doctor, former hospital director and long-standing human rights activist, will be tried on Monday, July 19, having spent 16 months in detention in Ho Chi Minh City.

“Why do the Vietnamese authorities lock up, for years at a time, distinguished old men for nothing more than speaking their minds?” Amnesty International asked today. “Dr. Nguyen Dan Que should never have been arrested and must be released immediately and without conditions.”

Dr. Que was arrested on March 17, 2003 outside his home in Ho Chi Minh City while on the way to an Internet café. It is believed that his arrest was prompted by a statement he issued on March 13 asserting that there was no freedom of information in Viet Nam. The statement was circulated via the Internet and published outside Viet Nam.

Dr. Que was initially held incommunicado and only in recent months has his wife been allowed to meet him in prison. He is in bad health and is known to be suffering from kidney stones, a bleeding ulcer and high blood pressure that requires medication.

“Dr. Nguyen Dan Que—a winner of numerous international human rights awards—has worked tirelessly to defend the fundamental human rights of his fellow Vietnamese, Amnesty International added. “His repeated imprisonment is both a personal and national tragedy.”

Amnesty International understands that he is to be charged with “abusing democratic rights to jeopardize the interests of the State”—the same charge levelled against two other elderly dissidents, who were brought to trial in the last two weeks. Dr. Nguyen Dan Que has not been permitted to meet with a lawyer and his family have not been given a formal charge sheet detailing the accusations against him. It is likely, therefore, that he will have no legal defense at his trial.

Amnesty International is calling on the Vietnamese authorities to ensure that Dr. Que’s trial meets with international fair trial standards and is open to outside observers.

### **Dr. Que’s Background**

Dr. Que has previously been imprisoned twice, for a total of 18 years. In February 1978, he was arrested and accused of “rebellious against the regime” and forming a “reactionary organization named the National Front of Progress.” He was released in 1988 after 10 years of imprisonment without trial.

He was arrested again in June 1990 after he founded the

Cao Trao Nhan Ban (High Tide of Humanism Movement) that called for democratic change. He also became a member of Amnesty International, which was used as an accusation against him. In November 1991, he was sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment for “activities aimed at overthrowing the People’s Government.” He was released under a special amnesty in September 1998. On both occasions, Dr. Que was adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

### **Growing Numbers of Elderly Prisoners of Conscience**

The United Nations definition of an elderly person is someone over 60 years old. This is also the definition accepted by the Vietnamese government. The international community increasingly recognizes the elderly as a particularly vulnerable group with special concerns and requirements.

In Viet Nam there are a growing number of prisoners of conscience who fall within this definition, many of whom throughout their lifetime have spent long periods in prison for peacefully exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association. An October 2003 Amnesty International report provided information on a number of elderly prisoners of conscience from different backgrounds who are currently serving prison terms, as well as elderly dissidents who are in detention awaiting trial or under house arrest. None of them have committed or advocated violence. These include the Orange group’s adopted prisoner of conscience, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, an 86-year-old Buddhist monk.

Thich Huyen Quang, the Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam, has spent most of the time since 1977 under house arrest because of his outspoken defense of human rights and in particular the right to practice religion freely. His current status remains unclear following recent developments in which he has been allowed to travel accompanied by security officials to other cities, including Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Thich Huyen Quang has also had meetings with the Prime Minister and members of the diplomatic community. He has however not been formally released from administrative detention and it is not known if he will be returned to house arrest. At last report Thich Huyen Quang was residing at the Nguyen Thieu Monastery in Binh Dinh province.

Amnesty International believes that no person should be detained solely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs. The lengthy confinement of older prisoners is of special concern. Societies are often legitimately judged on how they treat their more vulnerable members, including the elderly.

## June Meeting Minutes Group #175 Long Beach

### Attendees

Jim Roberts, Jamie (Hi-may) Skaluba, Mary Kay Dunn, Deidre Jackson, Kevin Gaffney, Norma Edwards, Shean McMahon, Omar Ramos, Caitlin Cook, Bobbi Kendig.

### Letter-Writing

The group wrote approximately 40 letters to various officials and to prisoners in the Summer Postcard Action. It was nice to take time to write directly to people whom we help out.

### Tabling

We discussed our tabling at the Long Beach Farmer's Market. At the market, we had six new people sign up to receive information about our group. While we were overall pleased with the tabling, we decided that perhaps having fewer people standing at the table at one time may make it easier for people to stop by. We also heard a great suggestion to offer Lifesavers for those who do stop by and sign a petition. That along with rocks to hold down the weight and chairs for us to sit at were suggested, along with having new group flyers available. We are looking at doing the Market again on either July 16 or 23. Stay tuned to the email list for more information.

### Death Penalty Training

We took time to review again the Death Penalty training that Kevin and Deidre had given at the prior meeting. It was a good overview and the "Fishbowl" technique of having each other ask/answer questions as if we were tabling was very helpful. Mary Kay is our new Death Penalty Coordinator and we are happy to have her take on this role. Thanks Mary Kay!

### Play

Bobbi had been contacted by Marion Scherer who wrote a play about the death penalty titled *Prison of the Mind*, We will be looking into having a showing of the play and will invite/ask other groups to join us in the endeavor.

### Women's Campaign

Jaime gave us a brief overview of the Women's Campaign and offered to provide us with a training in the fall. She will work on giving us more detail of what is happening and how our group can help. Of special note was the focus on Women in Conflict and Post-Conflict areas. Stay tuned for more news.

### Prisoner Update

Jim gave us an update on our prisoner in Viet Nam, Nguyen Dinh Huy, who has been imprisoned for expressing his political beliefs. Nothing new has changed, but the crackdown on journalists in Viet Nam has increased. Jim updated us via email about Viet Nam: a Buddhist dissident was exiled abroad and an elderly Vietnamese dissident is to face trial in Hanoi this month.

### Myanmar Update

We also talked about Aung San Suu Kyi celebrating her birthday and the fact the Myanmar (formerly Burma) is in the progress of making a constitution. While this may be a good thing, it appears the current government is steering the direction of the Constitution to keep them in control. Here are some details excerpted from news reports:

On July 9, the military rulers adjourned a constitution-drafting assembly touted as a first step to democracy despite the absence of the main opposition led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. The National Convention, which opened on May 17 with most of its 1,088 delegates handpicked by the junta, would resume after the monsoon season.

Critics say the process has no credibility without Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD), which refused to take part while she remained under house arrest. Delegates are banned from discussing or criticising the convention, held at a tightly-guarded compound outside Yangon, and could face a hefty fine or up to 20 years in prison. Last month, UN human rights Paulo Sergio Pinheiro likened the convention to "mass house arrest". He said a democratic transition would be impossible unless the generals eased curbs on free, open discussion at the convention.

On July 6, the United States renewed for another year trade sanctions intended to punish Yangon for detaining Suu Kyi, who was held at an undisclosed location from May to September last year and then placed under house arrest. The U.S. sanctions bar imports from the former British colony.

"We have seen no such tangible progress since the May 30, 2003 attack on National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo remain under house arrest and most district party offices remain closed. Over a thousand other political prisoners remain in jail and arrests continue. The regime has promised a return to democracy and has launched a National Convention. However, with the democratic opposition and its leadership unable to participate freely, this process cannot reflect the aspirations of the Burmese people."

## June Meeting Minutes Group #178 Irvine

### Discussion

At our June meeting, the Irvine group covered our current campaigns. After looking at the treasurer report, the group voted to contribute \$500 to the national organization for our 2004 group dues.

We agreed to participate in a fund-raising event to take place in July 2005, where we would provide the people to staff an ice cream booth at the Orange County fairgrounds, during a swap meet, and we would keep 100% of the proceeds (the ice cream is donated.) Darcie Guy is coordinating this fund-raiser.

### Myanmar Documentary

We viewed a documentary on Myanmar, *In the Shadow of the Pagodas*, directed by Irene Marty. The video was brought to our group by group member Maung Nyeu.

### Upcoming Meetings

At our July meeting we will see a video discussing effective methods of non-violent resistance: a section of the documentary series *A Force More Powerful*, with emphasis on events in Chile.

At our August meeting we will have a special presentation on the Women's Campaign by group member Stephanie Jones.

## July Meeting Announcement

### Group #596 Huntington Beach

At our July meeting, Monday, July 26, AI Group #596 Huntington Beach will feature a discussion on human trafficking.

*You decide to answer an ad that is seeking people to be trained as domestic servants. You go to the address given and you are abducted. You are taken out of the country and held in seclusion where you don't speak the language and you are forced into prostitution. You are 17 years old and the house you are being held in is in Orange County, California.*

The epidemic is in our own backyard. We will show the documentary *Trading Women*, which focuses on the issues that lead to trafficking in Southeast Asia. We will also have two speakers: Lisa Ramirez, an immigration attorney who helps victims of human trafficking here in Orange County, and U.S. Assistant District Attorney Rob Keenan, who works with the Human Trafficking team for the U.S. Department of Justice in Southern California. We will also have updates on child trafficking in Afghanistan and Uganda. We will have actions to take part in.

Our meeting location is the Adult Center at Sts. Simon and Jude Church, 20444 Magnolia Street, Huntington Beach. **Please note the new location!**

## Afghanistan Event

The Irvine and Huntington Beach groups are working together to put on an event to educate and raise awareness of the current issues in Afghanistan. The event is scheduled for Tuesday, September 14, 7:00-9:45 PM, at Cal State Fullerton, University Hall 252. It will include a panel of speakers who will discuss and take questions and answers on the following topics:

- Human rights in Afghanistan.
- The past and present history of the women's movement in Afghanistan along with the struggles they have faced through the various governments that have held power.
- The current situation in Afghanistan, presented by a woman who is currently in Kabul with Relief International.
- Democratic elections and security.

In addition, the movie *Osama* will be shown. This is the first film produced in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, where the director, Barmak, explores the suffering of women under the Taliban regime. It was the winner of the 2004 Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film. Food and refreshments will be provided."

## The Forgotten Crisis: Darfur, Sudan

The numbers are far too staggering to comprehend: over 10,000 people in Darfur, Western Sudan have already been killed and more than one million violently driven from their homes. Over the past year the deadly conflict has reached an alarming state, plunging the people of Darfur into a human rights and humanitarian catastrophe. In what can only be characterized as "ethnic cleansing," the Sudanese Government and its proxy militia, the Janjawid, are indiscriminately and deliberately killing civilians (reportedly targeting the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups) and routinely using rape and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war. Almost every village in the region has been burned to the ground and depopulated.

The rainy season began in late May; unless humanitarian agencies are deployed immediately to deliver emergency food aid and medical attention to the displaced, a humanitarian catastrophe of epic magnitude may well devastate hundreds of thousands of people. February 2003, two armed opposition groups (the Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement) took up arms against the Sudanese Government because of what they perceived as the lack of government protection for their people and the marginalization and underdevelopment of the region. Since then, the Sudanese Government appears to have given free rein to Arab nomadic militias, known as the Janjawid, to quell the opposition. These militias have deliberately targeted black African civilians.

Often following aerial attacks, the Janjawid or armed men on horses', enter stricken villages to kill, torture, rape, arbitrarily detain civilians, burn down houses, steal and destroy crops and loot cattle. Despite a ceasefire signed between the opposition groups and the Sudanese Government in April, repeated breaches of the agreement continue to wreak more and more devastation on civilians.

### What You Can Do

AIUSA's Crisis Preparedness & Response Unit has mobilized a team of experts and staff, volunteers to act on critical issues currently facing Darfur. It is urgent that AI members and staff members devote themselves to preventing this crisis from exploding. We must call on the U.S. as well as foreign governments, the media and the public at large to make ending the human rights and humanitarian catastrophe facing the civilians of Darfur a priority.

For the latest educational materials, action opportunities, press releases and more, visit AIUSA's Sudan Crisis Page [www.amnestyusa.org/countries/sudan/index.do](http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/sudan/index.do)

If you would like to continue receiving this newsletter and supporting the work of the Orange County and Long Beach Amnesty International groups, please return this coupon to the address below with annual dues of \$10.00. Dues are used to cover the costs of this newsletter and of letters on behalf of prisoners. Your address label contains your membership expiration date.

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 Long Beach

*Please make your check payable to Amnesty International. Contributions to AI are tax-deductible. Thank you for your interest and support!*

# Calendar

## July

26 Monday 7:00 PM

**Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting** at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Room 7A, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. Group #596 meets the last Monday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Darcie Olson at (949) 650-5375.

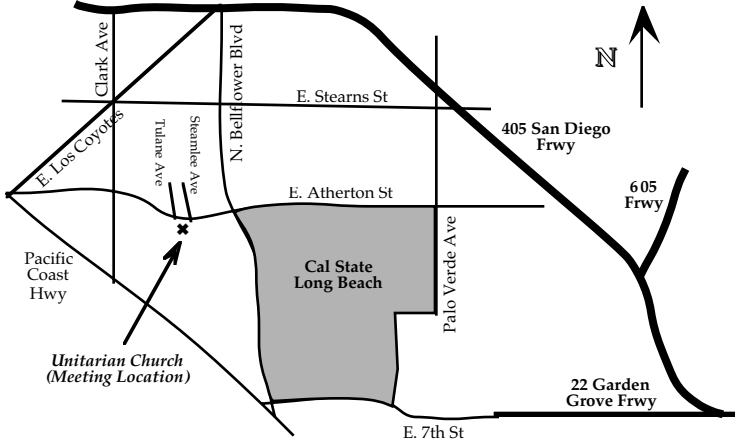
27 Tuesday 7:00 PM

**Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting** at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal and Parish Church, 3233 Pacific View Drive, Corona del Mar. See full details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. Group #178 meets the last Tuesday of each month. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoër at (714) 557-8427.

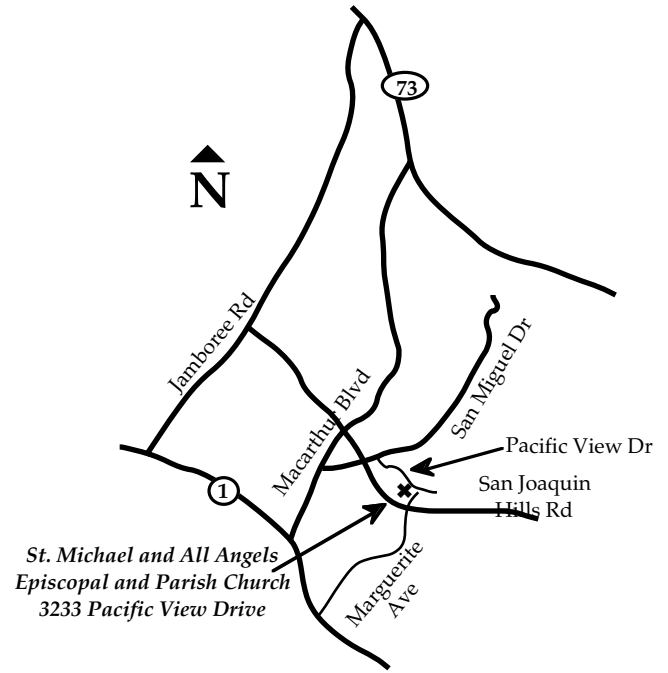
28 Wednesday 7:00 PM

**Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting** at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. **PLEASE NOTE THE NEW MEETING DAY!** For further information about the group, contact Bobbi Kendig at (562) 420-1155.

Group #141 Orange is on hiatus for the summer and will resume meeting in September on the third Tuesday of each month.



**Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Location**



**Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location**

Amnesty International  
P.O. Box 864  
Orange, CA 92856