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VIETNAM | Lawyer Sentenced to 15 Years

Six Vietnamese defendants, tried on April 5, were sentenced to 7-15 years in prison for activities against the state. Christian human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai received the longest sentence of 15 years in prison and a further five years under house arrest.

The defendants, including Christian human rights lawyer and pro-democracy activist Nguyen Van Dai, pastor and activist Nguyen Trung Ton and legal expert Nguyen Bac Truyen, were charged with “carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the government” under Article 79 of the Vietnamese penal code. The six will have a chance to appeal the sentences.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We strongly condemn these sentences and call on the international community to do the same. Nguyen Van Dai, Nguyen Trung Ton, Nguyen Bac Truyen and the other defendants have peacefully defended the rights of others in line with international human rights treaties to which Vietnam is a party. The accusations against them are an attempt to silence those calling for a just and fair society, and these unjust and lengthy sentences are a grim reflection of the direction the Vietnamese government is taking and the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. We stand with their family members and supporters in calling for their unconditional release.”

Lawyer and activist Nguyen Van Dai has provided legal advice and representation to victims of human rights abuses, including religious minorities, across Vietnam. As a result of his work, Dai has been repeatedly harassed and attacked by individuals working for the authorities and served four years in prison. Dai and his colleague, Le Thu Ha, were arrested Dec. 16, 2015.

Nguyen Trung Ton is a human rights defender and Protestant pastor who has advocated for the right to freedom of religion or belief and spoken out against social injustices. He and his family experienced first-hand the authorities’ persecution of religious minorities when they and their church members were repeatedly and violently attacked by local authorities and policemen. Hoa Hao Buddhist, Nguyen Bac Truyen, is a legal expert who has provided pro bono legal

assistance to families of political prisoners, victims of land grabs, and persecuted religious communities. Ton and Truyen were sentenced to 12 years and 11 years in prison, respectively.