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## VIETNAM | Sentences Upheld for Rights Defenders

Four Vietnamese human rights defenders, including pastor and activist Nguyen Trung Ton, had their sentences upheld in an appeal trial June 4. The four activists were among six individuals sentenced to between seven and 15 years in prison on April 5 for “carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the government” under Article 79 of the Vietnamese penal code. After April 5, statements of concern were issued by organizations in Vietnam and worldwide, as well as the European Union External Action Service, the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and a U.S. State Department Spokesperson.

Nguyen Trung Ton, whose 12-year prison sentence was upheld, is a pastor and activist who has advocated for the right to freedom of religion or belief and has spoken out against social injustices in Vietnam. Pastor Ton was previously imprisoned. He was sentenced to two years in prison in 2011, on charges of “anti-state propaganda” under Article 88 of the penal code.

In his closing defense statement, Pastor Ton said that “if the law has love for the people, then our country might have a future.”

Nguyen Bac Truyen, a Hoa Hao Buddhist and legal expert who has provided pro bono legal assistance to families of political prisoners, victims of land grabs, and persecuted religious communities, also had his 11-year sentence upheld June 4.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “The results of the appeal trials today indicate a worrying disregard for the work of human rights defenders in Vietnam. We restate our call on the Vietnamese government to release immediately, and unconditionally, these six human rights defenders, as well as all those detained for their peaceful defense of human rights, in line with Vietnam’s obligations as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”