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VIETNAM | Nguyen Bac Truyen Awarded Prize

Imprisoned Vietnamese human rights activist Nguyen Bac Truyen has been awarded the Stefanus Prize 2020 for his work promoting human rights in Vietnam, including freedom of religion or belief.

The Stefanus Prize was established by the Norwegian mission and the human rights organization Stefanus Alliance International and is awarded every other year to individuals who have “made an outstanding contribution to promote freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) in particular, and human rights in general.”

Nguyen Bac Truyen is 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. He was abducted by the Vietnamese police on July 30, 2017 in Ho Chi Minh City and held in incommunicado arbitrary detention in Hanoi until his trial.

In April 2018, he was charged with “carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the government” under Article 79 of the Vietnamese penal code and sentenced to 11 years in prison. During his imprisonment, concerns have been raised about Truyen’s health. In August 2020, a group of 62 parliamentarians from around the world signed onto an open letter calling for Truyen’s immediate and unconditional release.

In a press release by Stefanus Alliance announcing the award, Ed Brown, secretary general of Stefanus Alliance International said, “We are very happy with the decision of the committee to award the Stefanus Prize to Nguyen Bac Truyen. He has experienced how difficult it is both to be a minority and to stand up for the rights for religious minorities in Vietnam. He is a well-deserved winner of the award.”

Truyen’s wife, Bui Thi Kim Phuong said, “On behalf of the family and my husband, I would like to sincerely thank you for choosing Nguyen Bac Truyen for the Stefanus Prize. It is a great honor for Nguyen Bac Truyen to be recognized with the Stefanus Prize. I also feel greatly honored, and I am moved by this wonderful news. Thank you for your dedicated efforts in your work for the release of my husband. The friendly care

is a great motivation and a great encouragement for us. We do not feel alone and forgotten and ask for continued support.”

CSW’s Founder President Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW congratulates Nguyen Bac Truyen on winning the Stefanus Prize, which we hope will draw further international attention to his vital work promoting human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in Vietnam, at such great personal cost. His courage and commitment to protecting the rights of some of the most vulnerable people in society is an inspiration to us all. It is our hope that the prize will add even more weight to calls by his family and supporters for Truyen’s immediate and unconditional release from prison.”