



Viet Tan (Vietnam Reform Party)

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Vietnamese authorities stonewall defense lawyers in Ben Tre case

Just days before a major political trial, Vietnamese authorities continue to deny defense lawyers copies of basic documents relating to the case and access to some of the defendants.

Seven religious freedom and land rights activists will be tried at the People's Court of Ben Tre on May 30, 2011. They are Pastor Duong Kim Khai, Ms. Tran Thi Thuy, Mr. Nguyen Thanh Tam, Mr. Pham Van Thong, Mr. Nguyen Chi Thanh, Ms. Pham Ngoc Hoa and Mr. Cao Van Tinh.

As of today, defense attorneys have yet to receive a copy of the indictments. Defendants Nguyen Chi Thanh and Pham Ngoc Hoa have still not been granted access to their lawyer.

According to Article 166 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the prosecution must notify the accused and defense counsels within three days of the decision to prosecute the case and hand over the indictments. Defense counsels may read the indictments, take notes and copy documents from the case files. Article 58 stipulates that defense counsels shall participate during each stage of the criminal proceedings.

However, authorities have still not made the indictments in the Ben Tre case available; have prevented defense lawyers from making copies of trial documents; and have continued to block access to some of the defendants. The flaunting of their own laws--not to mention international norms on fair and open trials--demonstrates the lengths to which the Hanoi authorities take to silence opposing voices.

The seven activists in the Ben Tre case were arrested beginning in July 2010 and accused of "attempting to overthrow the people's administration." They have been arbitrarily detained for months for simply engaging in peaceful political activities.

Viet Tan urges supporters of human rights to condemn the upcoming sham trial and press for the immediate and unconditional release of these seven courageous prisoners of conscience.

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