



FREEDOM NOW

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MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE REVIEW
Event on March 4, 2004

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**MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ANNOUNCE KEY U.N. DECISION ON
UNLAWFULLY IMPRISONED VIETNAMESE PRIEST;
TWO NEW CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTIONS TO PUSH FOR HIS
UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE FROM PRISON**

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What: Members of Congress will announce the judgment of the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention over Vietnam's incarceration of religious freedom activist **Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly**, a Catholic priest currently imprisoned near Hanoi. U.S. lawmakers will also announce the filings of two resolutions calling for his release.

When: Thursday, March 4, 2004, 1:30 p.m.

Where: 340 Cannon House Office Building

Who: Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS)
Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ)
Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA)
Nina Shea, Vice Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
Jared Genser, President of Freedom Now and Attorney for Father Ly

Background: Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, a Vietnamese Roman Catholic priest, testified before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom *in absentia* on February 13, 2001. In his testimony, he criticized the Government of Vietnam's record on religious freedom. In direct response to his testimony, he was initially detained for "slandering" the Communist party and "distorting" the Government's policy on religion. On October 19, 2001, in a one-day closed trial, without access to counsel, Father Ly was convicted of undermining state unity and was given a 15-year prison sentence.

Since 1977, the Government of Vietnam has repeatedly arrested, harassed, and jailed Father Ly for his advocacy of religious freedom. In August 1982, Father Ly organized a pilgrimage to La Vang, a site holy for Vietnamese Catholics. Soon after, in November of 1982, he was convicted of leading an illegal pilgrimage he was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. Father Ly remained in prison until the end of his sentence in July 1992.

With his strong record of non-violent advocacy for religious freedom in Vietnam, Father Ly has enjoyed broad support from many Members of Congress who have been pushing for his release. Last June, for example, over 100 Members of Congress wrote to the Government of Vietnam to express concern about Father Ly's ongoing detention. Most recently, on January 8, 2004, Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) was granted a rare meeting with Father Ly in his prison cell.

For more information about Father Ly, please go to www.freedom-now.org.