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The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu

FREEDOM NOW

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release
August 24, 2011

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**FREEDOM NOW HAILS CALL OF 16 MEMBERS OF U.S. SENATE
TO U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE TO ADVOCATE FOR THE RELEASE OF
RENOWNED HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE FATHER NGUYEN VAN LY**

Today, a bipartisan group of 16 members of the United States Senate, led by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) called for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to urge the Vietnamese government to release longtime human rights advocate Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly. In the letter, attached, the Senators declared:

We write to express our deep concern regarding the re-arrest of Father Nguyen Van Ly by the Government of Vietnam and urge you to impress upon the Vietnamese government that it should immediately release him from prison. . . . The Government of Vietnam must be made aware that its continued refusal to permit the peaceful advocacy of basic human rights impedes the progression of U.S.-Vietnam relations. The governments of both Vietnam and the United States have indicated that they seek enhanced relations. Releasing Father Ly would be an important step toward demonstrating that Vietnam is serious about achieving that goal.

Other signatories to the letter included Minority Whip Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ), Assistant Majority Leader Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), as well as Chairman of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT).

Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner stated, "It is significant that 16 U.S. Senators are calling on Secretary Clinton to engage personally with the Government of Vietnam on behalf of Father Ly. It is our hope that Secretary Clinton will use all means possible to bring an end to Father Ly's unlawful detention and allow him to receive the medical treatment that he requires."

Father Ly is a 65 year-old Catholic priest and one of Vietnam's most prominent advocates for religious freedom, democracy, and human rights. In a trial that violated international fair trial standards, Father Ly was sentenced to eight years in prison and five years of house arrest on March 30, 2007 for engaging in pro-democracy advocacy. Father Ly suffered multiple strokes and was diagnosed with a brain tumor in prison and was released on medical parole on March 15, 2010. However, sixteen months later, Father Ly was rearrested on July 25, 2011. He continues to be in very poor health.

Freedom Now represents Father Ly as international *pro bono* legal counsel. In 2010, Freedom Now obtained a decision from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declaring Vietnam to be in violation of international law and calling for Father Ly to be free from arbitrary detention.

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Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 24, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write to express our deep concern regarding the re-arrest of Father Nguyen Van Ly by the Government of Vietnam and urge you to impress upon the Vietnamese government that it should immediately release him from prison. Father Ly is in poor health and has done nothing but peacefully advocate for the basic rights and freedoms of the Vietnamese people.

As you know, Father Ly, a Roman Catholic priest, was sentenced to eight years in prison and five years of house arrest on March 30, 2007 for exercising his rights to freedom of religion and expression. His case, like many others in Vietnam, illustrates that there is no clear boundary between religious and political freedoms. Father Ly suffered multiple strokes while in prison and was released on humanitarian parole on March 15, 2010 to seek treatment for a brain tumor.

However, on July 25, 2011, the Government of Vietnam returned Father Ly to prison, despite his ailing health and the fact that the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found his detention to be in violation of international law. We fear that Father Ly's re-imprisonment may further threaten his life.

While we appreciate that the Department of State issued a statement expressing concern over Father Ly's re-arrest, further action is needed. The Government of Vietnam must be made aware that its continued refusal to permit the peaceful advocacy of basic human rights impedes the progression of U.S.-Vietnam relations. The governments of both Vietnam and the United States have indicated that they seek enhanced relations. Releasing Father Ly would be an important step toward demonstrating that Vietnam is serious about achieving that goal.

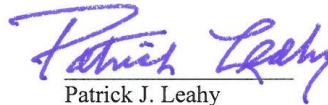
We urge you continue to advocate for Father Ly and for all those imprisoned in Vietnam for the peaceful advocacy of human rights.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



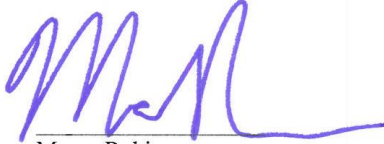
Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator



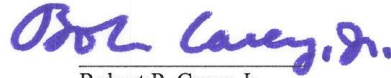
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



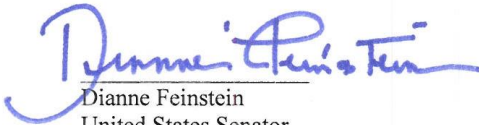
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey Jr.
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



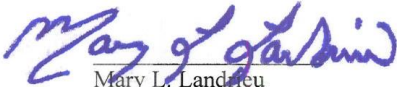
Jon Kyl
United States Senator



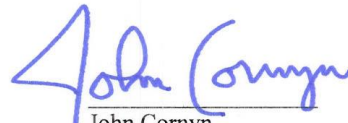
Thad Cochran
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



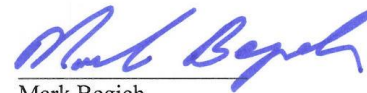
Mary L. Landrau
United States Senator




John Cornyn
United States Senator



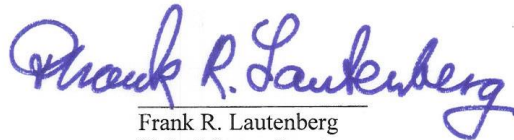
Mike Johanns
United States Senator



Mark Begich
United States Senator



Daniel K. Akaka
United States Senator



Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senator