



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Renewed call for action from UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to secure release of Vietnamese blogger activist Le Quoc Quan**

Human rights organisations around the world have again rallied together to demand the immediate release of Le Quoc Quan, a prominent lawyer, journalist and human rights defender who has spoken critically against the Vietnamese government.

On 5 September 2014, a coalition of human rights organisations filed a second petition with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) in Le Quoc Quan's case, alleging that the Government of Viet Nam has arbitrarily imprisoned one of its most vocal opponents. An earlier petition led to an opinion of the UNWGAD that called for Le Quoc Quan's immediate release, which was ignored by Viet Nam.

In its August 2013 Opinion, the UNWGAD, a tribunal set up under the United Nations' Human Rights Council, found that Le Quoc Quan had been targeted for his work as an activist and blogger. The Working Group believed that the profile of Mr. Quan is dominated by his work as a lawyer and as a human rights defender. The UNWGAD called for his immediate release or for his conviction to be reviewed by an impartial court. It also recommended that Le Quoc Quan should receive compensation for his arbitrary detention. As the Vietnamese Government has failed to comply with this opinion, the coalition has urged the UNWGAD to render a renewed opinion in the case.

While Le Quoc Quan was imprisoned for alleged tax evasion, the tribunal found that his detention might be “the result of his peaceful exercise of the rights and freedoms guaranteed under international human rights law” and “related to his blog articles on civil and political rights.” The tribunal added that “given Mr Quan’s history as a human rights defender and blogger, the real purpose of the detention and prosecution might eventually be to punish him for exercising his right [to freedom of expression] and to deter others from doing so.”

The UNWGAD’s opinion in the case of Le Quoc Quan has been ignored by the Vietnamese authorities. Le Quoc Quan’s conviction and ongoing detention are arbitrary and violate his rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association, a fair trial and his rights as a human rights defender.

The petition has been filed by the Media Legal Defence Initiative on behalf of a coalition of other NGOs, including Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada, Lawyers for Lawyers, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Reporters Without Borders, English PEN, Avocats Sans Frontières Network, Article 19, National Endowment for Democracy and the World Movement for Democracy, and the Center for International Law Philippines.

The UNWGAD will report to the UN Human Rights Council during the upcoming 27<sup>th</sup> session, which will take place as of 8 September 2014 in Geneva.

Notes to editors:

- Le Quoc Quan was arrested on 27 December 2012 on baseless charges of tax evasion. Following his arrest, he was held incommunicado and denied permission to see his lawyer for two months. Repeated requests by his family to visit him were also denied. Mr Quan first saw a family member at his trial on 2 October 2013, at which he was convicted of evading corporate income tax and sentenced to 30 months imprisonment and a fine of 1.2 billion dong (approximately USD 59,000). His trial began and ended on 2 October 2013.
- On 18 February 2014, Mr Quan’s conviction and sentence were upheld on appeal, despite calls for his release by multiple human rights organisations. Mr Quan had not been able to communicate with his lawyers until the appeal hearing. The trial lasted a mere four hours and the court took 30 minutes to reach its decision.

- The Vietnamese government has long persecuted Le Quoc Quan for his human rights work. In 2007, after representing numerous victims of human rights violations, he was disbarred from practicing as a lawyer on suspicion of engaging in “activities to overthrow the regime”. He has been arrested several times for continuing his human rights advocacy. Following an attack by unknown assailants in August 2012, he was hospitalised. The attack was never investigated by the police.

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