

PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

AN ORGANIZATION OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

June 6, 1994

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Anjali Kochar

Program Assistant

Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights

1206 30th Street, NW

Washington, DC 20006

Dear Anjali:

I would like to nominate Dr. Nguyen Dan Que of Vietnam for the 1994 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award.

Dr. Que, a 52-year-old endocrinologist, has spent the last nineteen years in prison. His most recent arrest was four years ago. On November 29, 1991 at the People's Court in Ho Chi Minh City, Dr. Que was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment--accused of carrying out propaganda against the government through the formation of his political movement, "Cao Trao Nhan Ban" (Non-Violent Movement for Human Rights in Vietnam). The Vietnamese government accused him of writing and distributing in Vietnam and abroad pamphlets denigrating the ruling Communist Party. Dr. Que's organization called for nonviolent, political, social and economic change, including the introduction of a multiparty system, in Vietnam.

Dr. Que is currently serving his sentence in solitary confinement in Xuan Loc prison in Dong Nai province. The BBC Far Eastern Service has described Dr. Que's sentence as "draconian.. by any standard".

Born in Hanoi in 1942, Dr. Que graduated in medicine from Saigon University and joined the teaching staff of the university medical school, specializing in thyroid disease and diabetes. In 1975, he was appointed Chief of the Medical department at Cho-ray Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City. Under the sponsorship of the World Health Organization, he undertook research in Paris, Brussels (Universite Libre de Bruxelles), and London (Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital).

Concerned about the standards of medical care in the country and the shortage of medicines, Dr. Que

became disillusioned and openly criticized the new government's health care policies and formed a "reactionary" organization called the National Front for Progress in 1976. The organization gained the support of many intellectuals and published two underground newspapers: one for students, the other for the general public. This activity reportedly led to his dismissal from the hospital and his first arrest in 1978. He remained imprisoned for 10 years, until 1988, without charge or trial, during which time family members say he was tortured, kept in solitary confinement, and deprived of adequate nutrition.

In 1990, following his release and inspired by democratic movements in Eastern Europe, Dr. Que helped found the political reform movement known as the Non-Violent Movement for Human Rights in Vietnam. He also became the first member of Amnesty International in Vietnam. On May 11, 1990, Dr. Que issued a petition that called for the Communist Party to "respect the human, civil and property rights of the people" and to "adopt a pluralistic political system." The appeal was released to various international news agencies and friends in Canada and France. Dr. Que also sent letters protesting human rights abuses to the governments of China, Turkey, Greece, Colombia, and the Philippines.

According to Amnesty International, the government arrested Dr. Que again on June 14, 1990 for "peacefully criticizing the government." His trial on November 29, 1991 did not meet minimum requirements for judicial fairness. Although the right to a legal defense is guaranteed by the Vietnamese Constitution (1980) and the Criminal Procedure Code (1990), the government refused to allow Dr. Que a lawyer during the trial or during his 18 months of pretrial detention. The court did not allow him to speak in his own defense, and Dr. Que's family and the public were barred from the hearings.

The Non-Violent Movement for Human Rights in Vietnam continues to receive wide support from the Vietnamese who live inside Vietnam as well as those from the community abroad, according to his brother, Dr. Quan Quoc Nguyen of Virginia.

Dr. Que's family arrived in South Vietnam from Hanoi in 1954 after the Geneva Peace Accords, which divided Vietnam into North and South. When Communist forces advanced on Saigon in 1975, Dr. Que decided to remain in Vietnam to fight for independence. His father was among the leaders of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party murdered in Hanoi in the 1940s. Dr. Que decided that he would like to continue to teach medicine and serve the impoverished. He thought that as a doctor he would be free from harm.

Lane Kirkland, of the AFL-CIO, recently likened Dr. Que to the former Soviet Union's Andrei Sakharov and Poland's Lech Walesa. U.S. Senator Robert Kerrey has compared Dr. Que's moral authority to that of Vaclav Havel. President Clinton, Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord, Senator Charles Robb, Representative Leslie Byrne and Senator Edward Kennedy have advocated his release. Several members of Congress nominated Dr. Que for the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and other human rights organizations have declared that Dr. Que's detention is arbitrary and in contravention of articles within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

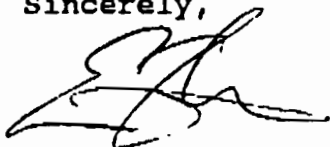
My PHR colleagues and I are particularly concerned about Dr. Que's health. He reportedly suffers from hypertension and a bleeding gastric ulcer. It is uncertain if he has received the proper medical attention required. Our repeated requests for permission to send a physician to examine Dr. Que have been denied.

Dr. Que remains imprisoned in Xuyen Moc prison, 150 km. southeast of Ho Chi Minh City. (His address is KHU ABC KAG-DOI 16T-34S, Xuyen Moc, Vietnam.)

Dr. Que has crusaded for human rights in Vietnam for almost twenty years. In the face of personal danger, he has battled relentlessly for freedom of expression, association, and assembly and for the acceptance of a multiparty system and free and fair elections.

I believe that Dr. Que's achievements exemplify the traits embodying the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Stover', written in a cursive style.

Eric Stover
Executive Director

enclosures