

## October 29, 2001: Commission Condemns Harsh Sentence Meted Out to Vietnamese Priest

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom today strongly condemned the harsh, 15-year sentence Vietnamese authorities have reportedly handed down to Father Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly, a Roman Catholic priest. Fr. Ly was charged with disobeying probation rules and "undermining national unity." "This kind of behavior does not help the Vietnamese government make its case that it deserves additional trade benefits and international loans," said Commission Chair Michael K. Young. "In order to have credibility on other issues, Vietnam must uphold its international human rights and religious-freedom commitments." Fr. Ly is an advocate of religious freedom in Vietnam who has been persistently critical of the Vietnamese government's failure to protect religious freedom - criticism that led to his imprisonment for close to a decade. Since 1994, Fr. Ly has issued, on different occasions, a "10-point statement" publicly calling for religious liberty in his country. The Commission invited Fr. Ly to testify at its February 2001 hearing on religious freedom in Vietnam, and he submitted written testimony. Fr. Ly's testimony and his participation in a meeting (also in February) with other Vietnamese religious dissidents to establish an interfaith council resulted in his arrest and "administrative detention" in March 2001. The Vietnamese government took action against Fr. Ly despite protests by this Commission, members of Congress, and the State Department. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly raised the issue of Fr. Ly's arrest during May 2001 meetings with Vietnamese officials in Vietnam (Fr. Ly was reportedly arrested on the day before Assistant Secretary Kelly met with the Vietnamese) and in June 2001 the State Department publicly called for the release of Fr. Ly and other religious dissidents.

Michael K. Young, Chair

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