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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) urges the U.S. government to speak out publicly on behalf of jailed human rights defender Cu Huy Ha Vu, who was found guilty and sentenced to seven years under vague national security laws for his activities defending victims of land confiscation and abuse of power, including representing the Catholic villagers of Con Dau.

“Cu Huy Ha Vu’s arrest is part of a disturbing trend in Vietnam where the defenders of the vulnerable are attacked as threats to national security,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. “The Obama Administration cannot continue to advance Vietnam’s security and economic interests without seeking concrete improvements on U.S. interests in religious freedom and the rule of law. It’s past time for the Administration to re-designate Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).”

Cu Huy Ha Vu is a well known human rights defender who has sued the Vietnamese government to protect cultural heritage sites and publicly criticized officials for corruption and persecution of dissidents. In October 2010, his law firm took on the case of the Catholic villagers of Con Dau, near Da Nang. Residents of this village faced government-organized harassment, detention, torture, and arrest for refusing to sell or vacate land—including a long-standing religious burial site that has been in their village for 135 years—to create an eco-tourist resort. Cu Huy Ha Vu was arrested soon after speaking out publicly about their case. USCIRF testified at the August 2010 Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on efforts by the Vietnamese government to obtain the property of Con Dau residents and about general religious freedom conditions in Vietnam. A copy of this testimony can be found at www.uscirf.gov.

Cu Huy Ha Vu is the latest in a long list of human rights advocates in Vietnam who have faced government persecution for representing vulnerable communities, including religious groups and individuals. Among the advocates who have been arrested and harassed for representing religious communities or advocating for greater religious freedom including Le Cong Dinh, Nguyen Van Dai, Le Thi Cong Nhan, Le Tran Luat, Le Quoc Quan, and Fr. Nguyen Van Ly.

“Vietnam has been called the United States’ new best friend in Asia, but it continues to trample on individual freedoms and the rule of law with impunity,” said Mr. Leo. “Re-designating Vietnam as a CPC is not only the right thing to do, it will advance the United States’ strategic interests as well, producing tangible religious freedom improvements on the ground without

hindering other bilateral interests. Most importantly, it will clearly signal that the United States sides with those in Vietnam who peacefully seek greater freedoms and rights.”

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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