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PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam: Conviction of Human Rights Activist Violates Right to Freedom of Expression

London 06.04.11: Prominent legal scholar and human rights activist Cu Huy Ha Vu has been sentenced on Monday 4 April 2011 by a Vietnamese court to seven years in prison and three years of house arrest for conducting anti-state propaganda activities. Vu's conviction is the latest and most prominent in a series of arrests and clampdowns on Vietnamese human rights defenders for challenging the government. ARTICLE 19 calls for the reversal of Vu's ruling and for his immediate release, along with the release of two high-profile Vietnamese dissidents, Pham Hong Son and Le Quoc Quan, who were arrested outside Vu's trial.

"The Cu Huy Ha Vu case highlights the Vietnamese authorities' mis-use of the judicial system to silence peaceful political dissidents and to suppress any form of criticism. The ruling goes against the right to freedom of expression and will instil fear and further self-censorship amongst activists in Vietnam," said Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

Cu Huy Ha Vu, 53, was arrested on 5 November 2010 for "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" (Article 88 of the Penal Code). Vu was charged with propaganda against the state, for posting online articles and giving media interviews that are critical of the ruling party, state institutions and policies.

Vu filed lawsuits against the Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in June 2009 and in October 2010, for approving a controversial Chinese-run bauxite mining operation in the Central Highlands and for signing a decree that prohibited class-action lawsuits respectively.

ARTICLE 19 is concerned that the court decision was based upon vaguely defined laws within the Vietnamese Penal Code, which permit the government to infringe upon the right to freedom and to imprison political dissidents and human rights activists for peacefully expressing their opposition to the government. In addition, none of Vu's offences can be justified as necessary to protect national security or public order.

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.