July 1, 2009

His Excellency Nguyễn Minh Triết
President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
c/o Embassy of Vietnam
1233 20th St NW, Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear President Triết:

We are writing to convey our serious concern regarding the continued detention of Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly and to ask for your assistance to ensure that Vietnam acts in a manner consistent with its own legal obligations and that of international law.

On February 18, 2007, your Government arrested Father Ly, a Catholic priest, at his parish in Hue. Shortly thereafter, on March 30, 2007, Father Ly was sentenced to eight years in prison and five years of house arrest for peacefully practising his faith, expressing his political opinions, and associating with others who shared those opinions. As you are no doubt aware, Father Ly’s longstanding non-violent activities to promote religious freedom and democracy in Vietnam are well known in the United States.

Based on information from international human rights advocacy organizations, it appears that Father Ly’s arrest and trial were seriously flawed. During his trial, which lasted only four hours, Father Ly was denied access to counsel and precluded from presenting a defense. When Father Ly attempted to speak, a security guard immediately silenced him by putting his hands over his mouth and removing him from the courtroom.

According to your Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Vietnam is a party, all citizens enjoy freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, freedom of speech, and the right to form associations. Both your Constitution and the ICCPR also guarantee criminal defendants the presumption of innocence, the right to present a defense, and the right to counsel. Father Ly’s arrest, trial, and ongoing detention in this instance call into question Vietnam’s commitment to these fundamental principles.

Given these serious flaws in relation to his arrest, trial, and imprisonment, we request that you facilitate Fr. Ly’s immediate and unconditional release from prison, and allow him to return to his home and work without restrictions on his right to freedom of expression, association, and movement. In the meantime, we also respectfully request that you provide us with any information your government may have concerning Father Ly’s health and welfare.

We thank you in advance for your assistance in this important matter.

Respectfully,

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Sam Brownback
United States Senator
Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Arlen Specter
United States Senator

Saxby Chambliss
United States Senator

Byron L. Dorgan
United States Senator

Jon Kyl
United States Senator

Carl Levin
United States Senator

Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senator

Richard Durbin
United States Senator

Chuck Grassley
United States Senator

Thad Cochran
United States Senator

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

Mark Udall
United States Senator

Mark Begich
United States Senator
Jim Bunning  
United States Senator

Orrin G. Hatch  
United States Senator

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

Tom Udall  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Barbara A. Mikulski  
United States Senator

Johnny Isakson  
United States Senator

Mary L. Landrieu  
United States Senator

Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator

Edward E. Kaufman  
United States Senator

Roland W. Burris  
United States Senator

Evan Bayh  
United States Senator

Frank R. Lautenberg  
United States Senator

Joseph I. Lieberman  
United States Senator