

Vo Van Ai's biography



Vo Van Ai is a Vietnamese human rights defender, writer and poet living in Paris. He is founder and President of Quê Me: Action for Democracy in Vietnam and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, Director of the International Buddhist Information Bureau, and Overseas Spokesman of the independent Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) which is currently banned in Vietnam.

Born in Central Vietnam in 1938, he was arrested and tortured at the age of 11 for participating in the resistance movement for the independence of Vietnam. In 1964, he became the UBCV's representative overseas, and worked actively in the nonviolent Buddhist movement for democracy and peace. After Vietnam was unified in 1975, he played a key role in drawing world attention to human rights abuses under the communist regime, and drew up the first comprehensive map of "re-education camps" (Vietnamese *laogai*) with 150 camps and over 800,000 prisoners. In 1978 he helped initiate a campaign to launch the "*Ile de Lumiere*", the first rescue ship to save Vietnamese Boat People fleeing for freedom on the South China seas.

A specialist on human rights and religious freedom issues, he makes regular reports to the United Nations and testifies at the US Congress, the European Parliament and other international forums on the human rights situation in Vietnam.

Vo Van Ai is also well known as a writer and historian. In addition to numerous articles and human rights reports, his written works include 17 books of poetry, essays and philosophy, as well as studies on Buddhism and Vietnamese history. He is currently writing a major work on "*The Essence of Vietnamese Buddhism*".