

Vietnam: Christian Activist Blocked From Meeting US Human Rights Official

Christian lawyer and human rights defender Nguyen Van Dai has spoken out about being barred from meeting with the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Daniel Baer, on April 13, when Baer visited Vietnam for the 17th Human Rights Dialogue.

Baer was able to meet with a number of **human rights** defenders during his visit, including lawyers, bloggers and advocates. He was also able to meet with some religious leaders. In a statement, the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi said, "While Mr. Baer was able to meet well-known activist Father Nguyen Van Ly in prison, we were troubled that authorities prevented a private meeting with activists Nguyen Van Dai and Dr. Pham Hong Son as planned."

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi sent Dai an invitation to meet with Baer, but Dai says that on April 12, a security officer phoned him and told him not to go to the Metropole Hotel for the meeting. Dai then relayed this order to the embassy, which confirmed that the deputy minister of the Vietnamese Public Security Ministry had agreed Baer could meet any Vietnamese citizen.

On April 13, the embassy told Dai that the Vietnamese authorities had allowed him to go to the meeting. However, on the same day, over 20 security officers and police came and blocked the way to Dai's home. When a political officer from the embassy tried to pick up Dai from his house that afternoon, security officers instructed 10 elderly women to block the officer's car. Unable to reach Dai's home, the officer had no option but to leave. According to Dai,

approximately 10 of his supporters were arrested by security officers when they came to see what was happening. They were detained and questioned for five hours.

“CSW is encouraged by Vietnam’s stated commitment to an ongoing conversation on human rights both inside and outside Vietnam-U.S. human rights dialogue, and by the broad range of Vietnamese activists who were able to meet with the U.S. delegation,” says Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) advocacy director Andrew Johnston. “However, we are concerned that **religious freedom** advocate Nguyen Van Dai and businessman and activist Dr. Pham Hong Son were prevented from meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary Baer. Constructive dialogue depends on mutual trust: When the authorities say delegates are free to meet any Vietnamese citizen, they should follow through with that assurance.”