

REPORT OF NGUYEN THANH NHAN

Concerning my arrest and experiences in prison

My name is Nguyen Thanh Nhan. I was born on September 25, 1982.
I am active in the Vietnam Mennonite Church in District 2.
Home address: Da Noi B Hamlet, Thanh Duong Commune, Tan Hiep District,
Kien Giang Province.
Current residence: House without number at To 79, Luong Dinh Cua Street,
Phuong An Ward, District 2, HCM City.

Reason: On the afternoon of the incident (March 2, 2004) we asked the public security police to make a report of what had happened at the site, but they refused to report accurately what had happened. After a struggle over the matter my older brother, Elder Nguyen Huu Nghia, was hit, arrested and escorted to the Binh Khanh Ward office. Later brothers Thach and Phuong and I went to see what was happening to my brother. We were arrested and accused of “resisting person doing official duty” by Binh Khanh Ward and District 2 public security police and other security forces and local defence forces.

That very evening of our arrest (2/3/2004) I was cruelly and savagely beaten by police in plain clothes and police in uniform, as were brothers Thach, Phuong and Nghia. They immobilized our hands and then used sharply pointed shoes to kick us all over our bodies and also nightsticks to club us repeatedly. After that we were taken to the District 2 police lockup. At first I was put into an individual cell and at dawn on 3/3/2004 a large group of District 2 police officers, some in uniform and some in plain clothes – I remember very clearly one police officer wearing a white bracelet (necklace?), a short and thin man, standing outside the cell using all kinds of coarse and vulgar language to humiliate me and also mock my faith and the Lord I worship. For example, he said “Your Lord you gangster is my prick” and many other disgusting and threatening words. He wanted to open the door of my cell and come in to attack me when I responded with a few words. And they continued to mistreat me brutally in this way for two days straight. I was beaten mercilessly without any reason at all, and deprived of water and food for the whole time until I became like a dead person.

At about 2:00AM on the morning of 4/3/2004 I was escorted to an official prison cell with other prisoners. These had been instructed before my arrival by the police that they had the responsibility “to beat and punish me appropriately” and were told they would be rewarded with ample food and cigarettes if they did. The moment I enter the cell I was continually beaten, punched and kicked. During my first days there I passed out several times from this treatment. For three months running the prisoners that had received orders to punish me continued to beat and punish me in all kinds of ways and I had to resign myself to this suffering, humiliation and bitter mistreatment. I was forced to sit with my legs crossed in one place and was not allowed to get up and walk – not even make a small movement. They also gave me hard work to do. They made me wash soiled clothes, draw the water to clean the cell, wash the dishes and all the while they did

not cease their torture and beating. When I was completely exhausted the police would take me out for interrogation. Though they say interrogation, which implies asking questions, there were no questions. Just documents already prepared for me to sign but I refused to agree with the terrible slander the government officials had prepared in advance to inflict on the Reverend Nguyen Hong Quang – the goal of which was to eradicate the whole house church movement which the government is trying to erase in all kinds of ways. They also did not stop denying all the tricks and schemes they use to try to accomplish this. And so they beat me and mistreated me incessantly without regret. And when I still refused to sign they would bring in some of their friends to sign in my place even though I disagreed.

And so for the days and months that passed I had to endure such treatment – whether day or night, when they brought me food it was not enough, water was often not drinkable. And when it was frightfully hot and humid and I was very tired there was no water for me to take a bath. And when it was cold and my family brought warm clothes for me I did not receive them. I was not allowed to wear any long pants or long-sleeved shirts. I was not given a sleeping mat. I had to lie on rough and dirty cement causing me to itch badly and giving me scabies. When I went to defecate they would not give me water to wash it down and made me use my fingers to push my own feces down the hole. I was forced to immerse myself in dirty water for long periods of time. And when I was allowed out I had to sit in a squatting position on the tips of my toes. My heel was not allowed to touch the earth and my face was had to be turned toward the wall. When my blood could no longer circulate I fainted and only then they stopped. This treatment continued for about a month and half until the middle of April 2004.

My bones in my feet began to ache acutely. I often fell hard. I had convulsions and found it hard to move around. My chest hurt a lot because of all the kicking. Also in the month of April it seemed to me that my heart hardly had the energy to beat. I felt pressure on my heart when I breathed. I often asked officials if I could go for medical check-up and get some medicine but it was not allowed.

At that time I was kept in cell no. 8, Brother Thach was in cell no. 4, Brother Phuong in cell no. 6, and Brother Nghia in cell no. 7. Their fate was no different than mine. Loud cries for help reverberated through the cell block when one of us was being savagely beaten by a gang of police. The cries gradually faded into hopelessness because who would dare try to intercede. The cries of Evangelist Thach, “Kill me! Kill me!” at first were very strong carrying loudly through the whole prison but gradually faded into a whisper when his strength was depleted. The cries of Brother Phuong and Elder Nghia when they were being kicked in the chest and head echoed off the walls of the whole prison striking fear into everyone. The prisoners in the cells talked with each other wondering what kind of crime the person had committed to deserve such brutal treatment. It must have been very bad! How would they know that we had been arrested only because we carry the two words “Tin Lanh” (meaning Gospel or Christian). How painful, how bitter!

After three months of all kinds of mistreatment like this at the hands of the police of District 2 of HCM City, around the end of June 2004 I was taken to a new prison at no. 4 Phan Dang Luu in the Binh Thanh District of HCM city. Another place and another version of torture reserved for me. I was put into a very small cell of prisoners being disciplined. It was only big enough for two people to lie down in. It was completely dark with no light shining in – only a badly smeared small light bulb burning day and night. It was frightfully hot and humid. When it rained it flooded. Roaches, ant and centipedes crawled onto the sleeping place causing us fear. One thing that was never missing was their attempts to get me to sign documents and reports even as I had to exist in such circumstances.

In September I was once more moved, this time to the Chi Hoa Prison. Before this move I had also heard that this was a place was well-know for drinking human blood. When I heard this, my whole body was terrified. And the heart did not dare think of anything but to pray to the Lord that His will be done. As I stepped through the gate of the prison I felt the gaze of many pairs of eyes of both uniformed security police and prisoners famous for their savagery, whose stock-in-trade is threats and bullying. In this place I was put into an even worse situation of torture. I continually grieve for the gang attacks on me without reason or cause, hard punches directly into my face and head. My eyes were red. My head was swollen. I felt a dull and never-ending pain as I was beaten all over my back with a nightstick. Officials who wore sharply pointed shoes did not cease from kicking me in the chest and bum and other parts of my body until I could not longer endure it and so I fainted, but they would drag me to another place and start again. And after a few days of recovery, the exercise to torture would begin all over again.

It continued in this way until I was taken to the court for trial on 12/11/2004. At this point we all had to endure pitiful injustice from an entirely unjust court. They had decided the sentences for us in advance of the trial. They held the trial for appearances only. Our ideas were completely ignored. The head judge at the trial would not let us say anything related to the truth during the trial. Outside they announce we have this right and that right, but inside they completely rob us of our citizen's rights and also the rights of the lawyer there to defend us.

During the trial I noticed that Miss Le Thi Hong Lien showed evidence of having had a mental breakdown. After the trial, we were escorted back to the prison in the same paddy wagon as Miss Lien. She was beaten right in the vehicle even though he was clearly very ill. My brother, Nguyen Huu Nghia, helped her and I warded off some of the blows to her.

For many hours we endured a farce of a trial, a trial disguised to fool people. And behind this trial, much happiness and satisfaction on the part of a society with a dictatorial regime, fearlessly using raw power and every kind of trick, crushing the heart of people, especially those of who live by a faith and particularly Protestant believers as well as religious believers in general. It has caused me to become despondent, and feel deep pain because of a dictatorship full of injustice.

And now, as I return to life I must carry a withered body. My left leg is partly paralysed and I can stand and walk only with difficulty. My nervous system is badly damaged as it was assaulted by clubs and switches and it will take a very long time to heal. After only two weeks of treatment, my doctor wants to back out saying he cannot cure me. I am not only suffering in my body, but also in my spirit and soul, and in material needs as well as support from my family and the church.

But I always believe that the Lord of Heaven will keep and preserve me, shield and carry me in the shadow of his powerful wings, and that the Lord will bring a revival to our country of Vietnam.

December 12, 2004

X – signed

Nguyen Thanh Nhan

REPORT OF NGUYEN HUU NGHIA

Concerning my experiences in prison

My name is Nguyen Huu Nghia. I was born in 1980.

I am active in the Vietnam Mennonite Church.

Home: Da Noi B Hamlet, Thanh Duong Commune, Tan Hiep District, Kien Giang Province.

ID card no. 370882527, issued 5/3/1997 at the Provincial Police station in Kien Giang Province

I would like to report what happened to me during the time I was in prison.

On the afternoon of 3/2/2004 I was present at the site when public security police came against us. When they used strong force against us low ranking, honest Christians simply because we were trying to keep intact the site of the incident so that the police could investigate it on the spot where it occurred, as they should - public security police, local defence forces and mobile security forces took me into custody and put me in a police vehicle. They kept jamming their elbows into my back all the way from the scene of the incident to Binh Khanh Ward office (about a kilometre). When we arrived at ward office they threw me out of the vehicle to the ground and two public security police using the tips of their boots and kicked me repeatedly. Then others got out of the vehicle and attacked me, using sharply pointed shoes to kick me all over my body and causing me sharp pain throughout my body. Four of them kicked me incessantly. One of them kicked me in the head until I passed out and they dragged me into a room and closed the door.

When I came to several police officers came into the room with a report they wanted me to sign, but the report was mostly aimed at the Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang. They said that Pastor Quang had incited and aroused us, but in truth we were only guarding the scene of the incident and no one incited us at all, but they tried to make me sign the report that they had pre-prepared. I refused to sign so they bullied me, swore at me and struck me trying to force me to sign.

At this time brothers Thach and Phuong came to the ward office to see how I was doing. They came into the room where they were trying to force me to sign the report. Officer Nhut shouted, "Kick that gang out of here!" When Thach and Phuong stepped out of the room, a large group of police officers attacked them tearing the off the clothes they were wearing and searching them all over their bodies. They seized a cell phone and keys to Thach's motorbike and captured both Thach and Phuong and put them into a room. At this time my younger brother Nhan stepped forward and they grabbed him as well and put him into the same room. When they had written up their report they took all of us to the District 2 Police Station. Before they put us into the cells, they called out the prisoners who were leaders in each cell and ordered them to beat us and punish us appropriately. After I had been beaten by my cellmates, the cadre gave them food and cigarettes to enjoy. They beat me several times a day and each time were given cigarettes to enjoy as a reward. Other prisoners in the same circumstances as we brothers gave up their humanity for a bit of food and some cigarettes. Denying their hearts they stretched out their hands and beat us savagely and mercilessly.

During my four months at the District 2 prison I was continually beaten by the gang leaders in the cell who were given permission by the public security police of the highest level in the District. I was given numerous documents and reports to sign which implicated Pastor Quang as a criminal. This continued on and on as they mistreated me and beat me savagely. They use their feet to kick me, and their hands to beat me in the chest and my face sparing no place! They continued this until I would pass out, and then they would pour cold water on me to get me to revive so they would continue, stopping only when I was like a limp and lifeless corpse. They refused to let me use the toilet. They looked for excuses to hit me and made me sit in a squatting position in a very small space until the duty officer got off work, and only then letting me up. They made me squat perfectly still, no movement at all. As I squatted like this, not moving, they would hit me.

I signed for the items brought by my family to feed me, but they would not let me have them. This treatment continued until was moved to the prison at 4 Phan Dang Luu. Street. During the approximately two months at this location my cellmates had mercy on me and helped me. What a blessing it is to have the Lord at one's side in all circumstances! But the "old tricks" continued. The brought me pre-prepared documents to sign admitting I had committed a crime, but mostly they brought documents implicating Pastor Quang in inciting and arousing others to commit crimes. This continued until I was transferred to the Chi Hoa Prison. In the months remaining I had to endure and overcome more violent storms, but the Lord was with me. The Lord helped me in my extreme hardships. The Lord protected me.

When they took Pastor Quang and us others to court, they brought out a result prepared ahead of time. When the lawyers who were supposed to be defending us made some appropriate arguments it had no affect at all on the proceedings of the trial. They sentenced me to nine months anyway. Oh, it was so painful to see those with power cover themselves with the mantle of their positions and pass unjust sentences on innocent Christians like me.

When they were transporting to the court for the trial, I was in the same vehicle as Ms. Lien. I noticed that Ms. Lien showed signs of having had a mental breakdown, but, even though she was obviously in very precarious health during the trip, she was beaten by her escort. When the trial was over, and five of us were being escorted back to prison, Lien was continually struck even though she was in very bad shape. I reached out to help Lien and my younger brother warded off some of the blows.

Oh, I perceive my life to be so filled with pain, because of the many blows my body has received, and the savage mistreatment. The agony of my brothers and sister is no less than mine, all of us innocent Christians having endured the same hardships and mistreatment. There is no way I can tell you the whole story. I don't know what hell is like but in the months past I feel as if I have been in hell.

I have now been released from prison and have been for a medical check-up. The doctor has given me an evaluation of my condition. My stomach and circulation have been affected and I find it hard to breathe and have a tightness in my chest, my eyes are blurry, my hands and feet are flaccid. The doctor says my heart arteries have been affected and my nervous system is disturbed and that these conditions are potentially life threatening.

Nevertheless, I believe that the Lord will always bless and keep me and heal me so that in the future I will have the strength to study His word and serve Him.

December 12, 2004

X - signed

Nguyen Huu Nghia