



International
Commission
of Jurists



EUROPEAN UNION



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



16TH YEAR OF SOMCHAI'S DISAPPEARANCE

COMMITTED TO MEMORY: THE DISAPPEARED AND THOSE THEY LEFT BEHIND

11 March 2020

Multi-Function Room, 1st Floor, Bangkok Art & Culture Centre

Background

12 March 2020 is the 16th anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Mr. Somchai Neelapaijit, a prominent human rights lawyer. He was disappeared after being stopped on a road in Bangkok on 12 March 2004 and was abducted from his car by a group of police officers. He has not been seen since. After 16 years since his disappearance, Somchai's fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

The disappearance of Somchai Neelapaijit is an emblematic case which reflects the lack of justice being provided to the victims and family members. From 1980 to May 2019, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has recorded and transmitted 90 cases of alleged enforced disappearance to Thailand. Currently, 79 cases remain outstanding, including: the case of Mr. Porlajee "Billy" Rakchongcharoen, an ethnic minority Karen human rights defender, who was last seen in the custody of Kaeng Krachan National Park officials in April 2014; the case of Mr. Thanong Pho-Arn, former President of the Labour Congress of Thailand, who was reportedly abducted in 1991; the case of Mr. Kamol Laosophaphan, a member of an anti-corruption network, who was reportedly disappeared after he inquired on corruption at the police station; the cases of several persons who were disappeared during the course of the conflict of Thailand's Deep South; and people who went missing in the "Black May" crackdown on anti-government protesters in 1992.

In most of the above-noted cases, the relatives experience poor reporting on progress and results of investigations. Thai justice system also fails to bring to justice people who have been responsible for such disappearances. Notably, in case of Billy, following the announcement that the remains likely belonging to Billy have been located, citing a lack of evidence, a Thai public prosecutor announced in January 2020 that murder and other serious charges linked to the killing of Billy in 2014 have been dropped against the key suspects in the case.

Apart from these outstanding cases, there are still those who have disappeared and whose voices have not been heard. For some of these cases, a prompt, effective, impartial and independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding a disappearance has yet to assess whether they are enforced disappearances, including those specific groups of especially vulnerable people like asylum seekers and indigenous populations. For example, Mr. Surachai Danwattananusorn (Surachai Saedan), a 75-year-old political activist who fled from Thailand to Lao PDR after the May 2014 coup. He went missing from his residence

in December 2018 along with two of his aides. The bodies of the two aides were recently found in the Mekong River. Mr. Siam Theerawut, an underground radio host, who had been arrested in Vietnam and sent back to Thailand in May 2019. He has not been seen since.

In light of the above, the Neelapaijit Family, Amnesty International – Thailand, Cross Cultural Foundation, Human Rights Lawyer Association, International Commission of Jurists, Protection International, and UN Human Rights Office for South-East Asia, with the support of the European Union, will co-host an exhibition featured personal belongings of those who disappeared or went missing, follow by a public forum to commemorate the 16th anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Mr. Somchai Neelapaijit and other cases. The forum will echo the voices of the victims and their challenges, discuss about the progress and development on the investigations, and evaluate the progress in Thailand's legal framework towards addressing this critical matter.

Tentative Program

14.00 – 14.20 Opening Remarks

- Ms. Angkhana Neelapaijit, wife of Mr. Somchai Neelapaijit
- Representative, Delegation of the European Union to Thailand
- Representative, Ministry of Justice

14.20 – 15.00 Committed to Memory: Exhibition Featured Photos and Personal Belongings of those who Disappeared

Family members to describe about the photos and personal belongings of the disappeared that are exhibited

15.00 – 16.00 Public Forum: The progress in Thailand's legal and investigation framework

- Ms. Angkhana Neelapaijit, wife of Mr. Somchai Neelapaijit
- Ms. Thipwimon Sirinupong, Lawyer who is representing case of Mr. Porlajee Billy Rakchongcharoen
- Representative, Department of Special Investigation, Ministry of Justice
- Representative, Office of the Attorney General

Moderator: Ms. Thapanee Eadsrichai

* Thai/English - using simultaneous interpretation

** Exhibition open: 10.00-19.00 hrs.