

PRESS STATEMENT

11 May 2016

Human Rights Defenders in Thailand at the 2nd cycle of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Thailand

Today Member States of the United Nations (UN) gathered in Geneva for the 2nd cycle of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Thailand.

Community-based Human Rights Defenders and civil society organisations welcome the statement by the Thai delegation led by the Minister of Justice, that Thailand acknowledges it is 'their duty that human rights defenders and lawyers can carry out their work in a safe and enabling environment.'

We note that at least 11 countries including Australia, Belgium, Botswana, Czech Republic, Iceland, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Switzerland and the UK made specific recommendations on HRDs.

Czech Republic recommended that Thailand ensure "a stop of harassment and intimidation of all HRDs and effectively to implement measures at preventing violence and crimes against them." Bolivia specifically recommended the protection of the rights of farmers and people who live in rural areas.

New Zealand expressed " ...strong concerns that the protection and promotion of human rights, particularly civil and political rights, have deteriorated in Thailand since the May 2014 military coup..."

No country made specific recommendation on women human rights defenders, who hugely contribute to defending human rights injustices in Thailand. Only Spain recommended implementation of the Gender Equality Act 2015 without restrictions on grounds of religion or national security as is now the case.

While the commitment for human rights defenders is good, Thailand must translate this commitment into concrete actions immediately.

In the past 20 years, at least 60 HRDs have been murdered and yet the perpetrators are yet to be brought to justice. Botswana specified that Thailand "investigate and ensure justice to all reported cases of intimidation, harassment and attack of HRDs and journalists..." Romania recommended that "perpetrators are brought to justice."

For exercising their freedom of expression, many HRDs have been targeted – charged with 'criminal defamation', forced into 'attitude adjustment' in military camps, and subjected to home visits by the military. Attitude adjustment includes being detained, kept incommunicado and "brainwashed"; and/or being forced to make public declarations that they will no longer be involved in political activities, that is, that they will abandon their struggle for human rights.

UK recommended that Thailand ensure that there are "no restrictions on freedom of expression especially for the media and HRDs, and no one faces threats and harassment including attitude adjustment for expressing their views ... and that all legislation concerning freedom of expression is compatible with international obligations as recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs in 2016."

New Zealand also called to “end the use of attitude adjustment and establishment of training camps”.

Belgium also recommended that Thailand “put into effect the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression...” Calls for freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and media freedom were made repeatedly by numerous member states.

US specifically called for the repeal of section 44 of the interim Constitution which grants the military government absolute powers and impunity with regard to fundamental freedoms and liberties.

Somchai Neelapaijit, Porlaiee Rakchongcharoen (“Billy”), and Den Khamlae (missing since 16 April 2016) are examples of HRDs who have been forcibly disappeared. A member of the Southern Peasant Federation of Thailand and another land rights activist from the North East, Mr Sawat Oppahad, are now being repeatedly threatened with enforced disappearance by military officers since the 2014 coup.

A majority of countries recommended full implementation of the Enforced Disappearances Convention, including the passing national laws criminalising enforced disappearance and torture, and recognising the rights of victims’ families to seek justice.

The human rights defenders in Thailand, women and men, who have courageously always upheld the cause of justice without fear or favour, appreciate the concern demonstrated by the UN member states, who have heard their voice.

We call on Thailand to accept all the recommendations concerning the protection of human rights defenders and freedom of expression, criticism, opinion, peaceful assembly including protest, and of the media.

We call on all the member states of the UN, and in particular the 11 countries who specifically expressed concern about the protection and freedoms of human rights defenders to work to ensure that there are no reprisals on HRDs. Member states must work with HRDs to continuously follow up on their recommendations to Thailand

Signed by:

Protection International(PI)-psomwong@protectioninternational.org
Southern Peasant Federation of Thailand(SPFT)- surapol.songrak@gmail.com
E-San Human Rights and Peace information centre - dinpon2009@hotmail.com
Front Line Defenders – sayeed@frontlinedefenders.org
MADPET (Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture)-easytocall@gmail.com
Franciscans International- b.tjahjono@fiop.org
Legal Action for Women, London & US – tel 00 44 207 482 2496 law@allwomenscount.net