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Thailand: Insurgents abusing human rights with attacks on civilians

Amnesty International today called for an immediate end to recent attacks against civilians by armed insurgents in southern Muslim-majority provinces.

So far, 2009 has seen a sharp spike in the number and brutality of attacks by insurgents, which constitute serious human rights abuses.

The insurgents direct some of their attacks at Thai security forces, and others at civilians they deem to be cooperating or collaborating with the authorities. They also carry out indiscriminate attacks that result in deaths and injuries to civilians. Amnesty International said that these attacks on civilians are unlawful and unacceptable.

Amnesty International called on the insurgents to respect minimum standards of humanity reflected in international humanitarian law, including the prohibition against direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks, and the requirement to treat humanely those who have been captured.

The fact that civilians are being deliberately targeted on a regular basis demonstrates that insurgents in southern Thailand have failed to abide by the most basic principles of humanity.

After the number of violent incidents and casualties in the south dropped significantly in 2008, insurgents are clearly attempting to reassert themselves in 2009. Moreover, attacks in 2009 have been notable for their brutality, including at least five confirmed beheadings:

- On 31 January in Rue-Soh district, Narathiwat, **Awae Salama**, a former Islamic religion teacher who sold goods near a local mosque, was killed in a drive-by shooting on his return home from the district market.
- On 16 February in Waeng district, Narathiwat, **five civilians, including one student**, were wounded by a bomb that exploded at approximately 7:00 am while a team of soldiers was escorting monks on their alms round.
- On 22 February in Raman district, Yala, a **civilian couple** engaged in tapping rubber was killed and the man beheaded.
- On 7 March in Pattani, **two middle-aged brothers, one an assistant village headman**, were shot dead as they rode a motorcycle, after which their bodies were set ablaze and a note was left at the scene: "This is revenge on state officials".
- On 12 March in Krongpenang district, Yala, **Laila Paaitae Daoh**, a human rights defender, was shot and killed in broad daylight, becoming the fourth member of her family (after her two brothers and husband) to be killed in the south; she is survived only by her three young children.
- On 27 March in Khok Pho district, Pattani, **Bhuvanart Yeeji**, a teacher, was shot and killed, while **Solahuddin Hayewaeji**, a school manager at Muhammadiyah School, was shot and injured while meeting with other teachers.

Amnesty International called on leaders of the insurgency to immediately cease all attacks on civilians, to instruct all those under their command not to attack civilians or their property under any circumstances, to remove anyone suspected of perpetrating such attacks from positions where they could repeat them, and to publicly condemn all such attacks.

Background

The insurgency in the southern Muslim-majority provinces of Thailand, which reignited in early 2004, has claimed over 3,500 lives, the majority of whom are civilians. The insurgents are a disparate and disjointed assortment of groups that have never fully revealed their organizational structure, leadership, or demands, but are believed to operate in a structure of at least partly autonomous cells. They seldom claim responsibility for their attacks, nor have they credibly expressed a willingness to negotiate with the Thai government.

Amnesty International fully recognizes that the Royal Thai government has a right and a duty to protect civilians in the south as it wages its counter-insurgency campaign. On 14 January 2009, Prime Minister Abhisit noted that the Emergency Decree in effect in the south had been renewed 14 times since it was first invoked in July 2005, and indicated his intention to review its provisions toward eventually lifting it and asserting civilian control over the security forces there. Amnesty International has previously called for Section 14 of that Decree, which confers immunity from prosecution on officials for human rights violations—including torture—to be amended or revoked (see AI report, *Thailand: Torture in the southern counter-insurgency*, ASA 39/001/2009). Despite a December 2008 decision in the post-mortem inquest into the death in custody case of imam Yapha Kaseng that he was tortured to death, the government has yet to initiate a prosecution against alleged perpetrators.

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