

UA 76/91

Legal Concern: Prisoners of Conscience

28 February 1991

THAILAND: Siritwat Kraisin, aged 25
Suwan Bandit, aged 26
Nattaphol Chunanantham, aged 19
Preecha Supatham, aged 20
Narong Kothanakit, aged 22
Pirapong Sangthong, aged 24
Suwanna Tapaniyakornkot, aged 21
Suriyachai Narknim, aged 28
Revat Sihuan, aged 28
Chiewcharn Kuachoo, aged 25
Sakchai Chotipan, aged 23
Suwit Ketkaew
Wanchai Phirun
Sayant Yuttitham
Chatpitak Sukkliang

Amnesty International is concerned that the 15 students and others named above have been detained for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of assembly and expression, during a non-violent gathering on 25 February 1991 at which they voiced opposition to and distributed leaflets criticising a military coup d'etat two days earlier. They were arrested by police enforcing Announcement No 7 of the National Peacekeeping Council (NPKC), a group of leading military officers who on 23 February abolished the existing government, parliament and constitution and proclaimed martial law. Announcement No 7 declares that "to prevent obstacles to national administration during the imposition of martial law, political gatherings or meetings of five persons or more are prohibited". Amnesty International believes that the use of this announcement to detain these 15 prisoners is contrary to Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards proclaiming the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression and opinion. Amnesty International urges that they be released immediately and unconditionally, and that Announcement 7 not be used to detain others for the peaceful exercise of their internationally-recognized human rights.

On 25 February several hundred people reportedly gathered at Bangkok's Ramkhamhaeng University at a rally organized by activists from campus groups, including the Saan Saeng Tong and Sajjatham parties, who have formed an "Anti-Coup Centre". Speeches were delivered by Siritwat Kraisin and Suwan Bandit, former president and vice president of the Ramkhamhaeng University Students' Organization, respectively. Siritwat reportedly declared that the coup d'etat "was against democratic principles in that the people's rights and liberties were seriously violated". Suwan asked the audience to support four demands put by the "Anti-Coup Centre" to the NPKC. These included the lifting of martial law within seven days; rescinding Announcement No 7 banning political gatherings; rescinding another NPKC decree banning activities by political parties; and drafting a new constitution and holding a general election within 90 days of 23 February.

In a meeting with representatives of student organizations on 26 February, Army Commander and first deputy NPKC head Suchinda Khraprayun reportedly said he was willing to consider releasing those detained, but only on the condition that they agreed to stop protesting against the military takeover. At the same time he also reportedly warned that the NPKC would arrest anyone else who violated martial law bans on political gatherings. At the last report, the 15 were still being held in five police stations

around Bangkok after having been remanded in custody by a Bangkok criminal court.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 23 February 1991 Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, General Sunthorn Khongsomphong, announced the overthrow of the government of Prime Minister General (retired) Chatichai Choonhavan. The Supreme Commander heads the NPKC, which also includes the commanders of the army, air force and navy. Prime Minister Chatichai was the head of the Chaat Thai (Thai Nation) Party, which won the largest number of seats in the last general election in 1988. He became Thailand's first elected prime minister since 1976. As prime minister, he had increasingly tense relations with senior military and police officers. He was seen as challenging their influence over the country's political life. In overthrowing the government, the military accused it of corruption and alleged that its policies had been unduly influenced by advisers brought in from outside the ranks of senior civil servants. Chatichai Choonhavan has been detained along with his recently appointed Deputy Minister of Defense, General (retired) Arthit Kamlang-ek, and several important aides and advisers. Other advisers have been prohibited from leaving the country, and some are in hiding.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern that the 15 students named were arrested for the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and opinion;
- urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released, and that all legal proceedings against them be dropped;
- asking for assurances that no one else will be detained for the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and opinion.

APPEALS TO:

Gen Sunthorn Khongsomphong, Supreme Commander
 Gen Suchinda Khraprayun, Army Commander
 ACM Kaset Rotchananin, Air Force Commander
 The National Peacekeeping Council
 Suan Runruedii
 Dusit
 Bangkok 10310, Thailand

Telegrams: Supreme/Army/Air Force Commander, Bangkok, Thailand

Pol Gen Sawat Amornwiwat
 Police Director General
 Ministry of Interior
 Asdang Road
 Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Telegrams: Police Director General, Bangkok, Thailand

Telexes: 84791 IMFODEP TH (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Faxes: + 66 2 224 6191; + 66 2 223 2215

COPIES TO:

Ramkhamhaeng University Students' Organization
 Ramkhamhaeng University
 Ramkhamhaeng Road, Hua Maak
 Bangkok 10240, Thailand

and to diplomatic representatives of Thailand in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 April 1991.