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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS AT DETENTION OF DELEGATES IN
THAILAND

BANGKOK – Amnesty International strongly protested today against action taken by the Thai government to disrupt the international launch in Bangkok of a worldwide campaign against human rights violations in China.

Two Amnesty International staff were detained by Thai police officials on their way to a scheduled press conference. The officials admitted that the delegates were detained in order to prevent the press conference taking place, and told them “it is not good for Thailand to allow an attack on China to come from here”.

“Amnesty International regrets that the Thai government should try to silence us in this way,” the organization said. “This action highlights the degree to which foreign governments continue to accept that China’s human rights record should not be open to international scrutiny and criticism”.

The two delegates, Anita Tiessen and Pierre Robert, were taken to a police station ostensibly to have their passports and visas checked. They were released two-and-a-half hours later, without any further explanation.

“As the delegates had been in Bangkok for several days, this visa check an hour before the scheduled press conference was clearly designed to prevent it taking place,” Amnesty International said. “The delegates obtained visas through the correct channels, declared the purpose of their visit and sought meetings with Thai government officials.”

Despite the detentions, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, Pierre Sané, managed to hold the press conference, where he condemned the actions of the Thai authorities, and said that Amnesty International would be sending a letter of protest to Thai Prime Minister, Banharn Silpa-archa. He briefed the international and Thai press on Amnesty International’s concerns in China.

Amnesty International’s campaign highlights the massive human rights violations which persist in China, despite economic reforms. The Chinese government allows torture to continue, uses the death penalty to try to cure social problems, brutally cracks down on ethnic groups calling peacefully for more independence, and detains hundreds of thousands of people every year without charging them with any crime.

Opening the press conference, Pierre Sané said: “the Thai government’s attempt to silence Amnesty International is futile. It does not augur well for the future of freedom of expression in the region. It must be linked to China’s growing power and influence and contempt for international human rights standards”.

Following the press conference, Thai police and special forces in riot gear stopped the delegation at the entrance of the Chinese Embassy, where they wanted to deliver Amnesty International’s report on China “*No one is safe*”.

Amnesty International’s report is being released simultaneously in press conferences around the world. Bangkok was chosen as the place for the international launch, because the organization has consistently been denied access to China. Bangkok is the first stop on a regional tour which includes Hong Kong and Tokyo. The Thai government’s attempt to disrupt the launch would seem to run counter to the good relationship the organization has always enjoyed with the Thai government, and Thailand’s international reputation as an open society, Amnesty International said.

“The Chinese government goes to great lengths to block international criticism,” Pierre Sané said. “The Thai authorities’ actions highlight the extent to which other governments are prepared to toe the line.”

“Amnesty International will continue to speak out around the world about the human rights situation in China. The international community should also hold China to account rather than acting in their own self-interest.”

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