

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Prisoner of Conscience

14 March 1991

THAILAND: Bandit Thammatrirat, aged 31

Amnesty International is concerned that Bandit Thammatrirat, a researcher on labour affairs for the Arom Phongpha-ngan Foundation, was arrested on 9 March 1991 for the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and opinion. It is urging his immediate and unconditional release.

Early on the morning of 9 March, Thai Special Branch police reportedly arrested Bandit Thammatrirat at his home in Bangkok, the capital. The arresting officers had reportedly staked out Bandit Thammatrirat's home for several hours, and at the time of his arrest seized a typewriter and one hundred envelopes.

That same morning, police also arrested a second labour activist, Sukhon Khaekprayuun, but he has reportedly been released and apparently will not be charged.

Bandit has been quoted as saying that at the time of his arrest, he was typing up leaflets criticizing the military coup d'etat which took place in Thailand on 23 February. According to other information, at the time of his arrest he was in possession of leaflets issued by Thai human rights activists and academics criticizing the coup d'etat for undermining democracy and human rights in the country; it is believed that Bandit Thammatrirat was preparing to distribute similar leaflets in trade union circles. The Arom Phongpha-ngan Foundation, a non-governmental organization for which Bandit Thammatrirat works, provides legal aid and educational services to trade unions. He is also the editor of the magazine Labour Review.

Explaining his arrest, senior police officials have reportedly alleged that Bandit Thammatrirat was in possession of materials containing "improper" statements about the current situation and stated that under the martial law imposed since the coup d'etat, those suspected of "untoward" political activities must face legal action. They have said that because the leaflets which Bandit Thammatrirat was allegedly producing criticized the military for staging a coup d'etat, he was threatening national security and trying to incite public disorder. However, there is apparently no evidence that Bandit Thammatrirat was advocating violent opposition to the current authorities.

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 abolition of the constitution and parliament, the imposition of martial law, a ban on political gatherings of more than five people, and a ban on activities by political parties. With other military officers, he announced the establishment of a National Peace-Keeping Council, now renamed the National Peace-Keeping Assembly (NPKA), to run the country. Supreme Commander Sunthorn heads the NPKA, 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, and was seen as challenging their influence over the country's political life. In overthrowing the government, the NPKA accused it of corruption.

Despite the promulgation of the interim constitution and appointment of an interim civilian prime minister, martial law and suspensions of civil liberties remain in force. In addition, Article 27 of the interim constitution gives the NPKA Chairman and the prime minister the authority to order indefinite detention of political prisoners without charge or trial and to order summary executions of any prisoner.

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

- expressing concern that Bandit Thammatrirat was arrested for his peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and opinion;
- urging that he be immediately and unconditionally released, such that all legal proceedings against him are dropped.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun
Government House
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Bangkok 10300, Thailand

Telegrams: Prime Minister Panyarachun, Bangkok, Thailand
Telexes: 84791 IMFODEP TH (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Faxes: +66 2 281 6782

General Sunthorn Khongsomphong
Chairman of the National Peace-Keeping Assembly
Building 608
Supreme Command Headquarters
Sri Ayuthayaa Road
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Telegrams: Gen Khongsomphong, Chairman NPKA, Bangkok, Thailand
Telexes: 84791 IMFODEP TH (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Faxes: + 66 2 241 1714; + 66 2 241 5720

Gen Itsaraphong Nunphakdii
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Atsadang Road
Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Bangkok, Thailand
Telexes: 84791 IMFODEP TH (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Faxes: + 66 2 224 6191; + 66 2 223 2215

COPIES TO:

The Arom Phongpha-ngan Foundation
Trade Union, Metropolitan Water Works Authority
372 Bamrung Meuang Road
Bangkok 10200, 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 25 April 1991.