

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

**AI Index: ASA 39/11/91
Distr: UA/SC**

UA 120/91 Legal Concern/Prisoners of Conscience

2 April 1991

**THAILAND: Dee Boonluacha
and 41 other Thai farmers**

Amnesty International is concerned that 42 farmers from Loeng Nokthaa district in Northeast Thailand's Yasoothorn province were arrested on 2 March 1991 for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of assembly and expression. Amnesty International urges that they be released immediately and unconditionally.

On 7 February 1991, farmers from the Beungkhaa and Saamyak areas of Loeng Nokthaa district reportedly launched a protest rally to demand what they considered just compensation for land they fear will be inundated or otherwise adversely affected by an irrigation project being constructed by Thailand's Royal Irrigation Department. The protest is said to have developed after local authorities revised an earlier estimate of the amount of land to be affected. The original estimate, which was put forward by the cabinet of deposed Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, reportedly offered compensation for some 750 hectares of land. Local authorities allegedly instead offered compensation for only 160 hectares.

The gathering to demand greater compensation was reportedly conducted on land worked and lived on by the protesting farmers. There is apparently no evidence that it involved any violence or advocacy of violence. It continued after the military coup d'etat of 23 February, until 2 March, when district police arrested 42 people whom they considered to be protest leaders. According to the latest information, they are still held in the Yasoothorn provincial prison. They are accused of violating Announcement 7 of the National Peace-Keeping Command, the body that carried out the coup d'etat. Announcement 7 prohibits political gatherings of more than five people.

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, and a number of restrictions on civil and political liberties, including Announcement Number 7. 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 and political 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 42 farmers from Loeng Nokthaa district of Yasoothorn province were arrested on 2 March 1991 for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of assembly and expression;

- urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released and that all legal proceedings against them are dropped.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun
Government House
Nakhorn Pathom Road
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
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

**Telegrams: Gen Khongsomphong, Chairman NPKA,
Bangkok, Thailand**

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

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

Telegrams: Minister Interior, Bangkok, Thailand

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

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

COPIES TO:

The Governor
Ampheur Meuang
Yasoothorn Province 35000, Thailand

Union for Civil Liberty
109 Suthisarnwinitchai Road
Samesennok, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, 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 14 May 1991.