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Thailand: High Time for Justice

Amnesty International calls on authorities to reopen the investigation into the killing of environmental activist Charoen Wat-aksorn following the Thai Supreme Court's upholding of the acquittal of a former local official who had originally been convicted of masterminding his death.

Charoen, 37, a pineapple farmer, successfully mass mobilised local communities to stop the construction of two power plants in Prachuab Khirikan. He was shot as he got out of a bus in Bo Nok, Muaeng District, Prachuab Khirikan on 21 June 2004. At the time he was returning from testifying to a parliamentary committee in Bangkok, and had earlier registered complaints about official collusion in the illegal transfer of public land in Bo Nok.

The Supreme Court's ruling upholds the Appeal Court's decision to overturn the conviction of a former local official for Bo Nok who was convicted of masterminding the murder in 2008 and sentenced to death. It also upholds the acquittal of his two sons, a local councillor and a lawyer at the original trial in 2008. The Appeal Court had acquitted him of the crime on the basis of lack of evidence, not least because the two gunmen who had told police that he had hired them to carry out the murder had died by the time of the original trial. Both men died in custody in March and July 2006 respectively, before they were able to testify in court. Thailand is obliged under international human rights law to respect and protect the right to life, and to take measures to redress violations of that and other rights. The failure of the authorities to provide redress for Charoen and his family is a tragic development in a long battle for justice for him and other human rights defenders in Thailand, and perpetuates the ugly prevailing pattern of impunity for the continuing killings, attacks and harassment of human rights defenders in Thailand.

Amnesty International renews its calls on authorities to take measures to protect all human rights defenders from attack and ensure that those responsible for crimes against them are brought to justice - including by providing protection to defenders at risk, and to witnesses of crimes against them.