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Thailand: Death threats against a Human Rights Defender

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Amnesty International is gravely concerned that Dr. Pradit Chareonthaitawee, a National Human Rights Commissioner in Thailand, has received death threats today and yesterday from an anonymous telephone caller to his private residence. He was told by the caller to stop talking to the United Nations (UN) or he would die.

"The Royal Thai Government should do everything in its power to provide protection to Dr. Pradit and his family. It should also immediately initiate an investigation into these repeated death threats," Amnesty International said today.

Dr. Pradit and other Human Rights Commissioners have publicly expressed their concern about the killings of over 1,000 drug suspects in the Royal Thai Government's campaign against drug trafficking which began on 1 February 2003. The circumstances of most of these deaths are unclear. In addition the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions, Amnesty International, and other regional human rights organizations have issued public statements about the large number of killings.

A government spokesperson said that *Thai Rak Thai*, the political party of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, may begin proceedings in Parliament to gather signatures of law-makers in support of the dismissal of Dr. Pradit as a National Human Rights Commissioner.

Dr. Pradit Chareonthaitawee also received anonymous death threats in 1992 when he was Chairman of a subcommittee established to investigate the whereabouts of people who had gone missing during the military's violent suppression of pro-democracy demonstrators that year. As soon as he resigned from his post, death threats against him and his family stopped.

Background

The government's "war on drugs", which will last for three months, has sparked widespread debate both domestically and internationally. The government claims that the vast majority of deaths were a result of drug traffickers killing one another. The authorities said further that the security forces were responsible for only a small number of killings, which were in self-defence.

According to a recent government statement, the Thai authorities have established two committees which will "monitor the implementation of the present policy and protect witnesses in drug-related murder cases and those who turned themselves in to the authorities". Amnesty International welcomes such a move, and calls on the government to ensure that all investigations are prompt, effective, independent and impartial.

Amnesty International recognizes that drugs are an increasingly serious problem in Thailand, but remains concerned at the growing number of killings in the context of the government-led campaign against drugs.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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