

URGENT ACTION

FEARS OF ABDUCTION FOR THAI ACTIVIST IN EXILE

Wanchalearm Satsaksit, a Thai activist in exile, was reportedly abducted by unknown persons from outside his apartment building in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. A known dissident in Thailand, who often exercised his right to freedom of expression online in exile, Thai authorities issued a warrant for his arrest in 2018. Wanchalearm Satsaksit is among nine Thai activists who sought exile in neighbouring countries, that have gone missing in recent years. Two of them are confirmed to have been killed. Cambodian authorities must thoroughly and effectively investigate his disappearance and seek to establish his whereabouts, as provided by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Prime Minister

Office of the Prime Minister
Jok Dimitrov Boulevard Phnom Penh,
Cambodia
Fax: +855 23 360 666 / +855 23 880
Twitter: @PeacePalaceKH

Dear Prime Minister Hun Sen,

I am writing to express my grave concern about reports that **Wanchalearm Satsaksit**, a 37-year old Thai activist, has gone missing in Phnom Penh.

A family member reported Wanchalearm Satsaksit's abduction on 4 June, after speaking to him on the phone around 4.30 pm that day. During the call, Wanchalearm left his flat to purchase food. However, according to the relative, their conversation ended abruptly with Wanchalearm saying that he was choking and could not breathe. According to reports, CCTV footage from Wanchalearm's apartment block apparently show a black Toyota Highlander SUV departing from outside the condominium. His whereabouts remain unknown.

Thai authorities have filed charges against him on account of his peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression while in exile, most recently in 2018 under the Computer Crime Act and Article 116 of the Penal Code governing sedition, alleging that he had posted anti-government material on a Facebook group called "I will certainly receive 100 million from Thaksin." Thai authorities allegedly requested his extradition from Cambodia in the past.

I therefore urge you, Prime Minister Hun Sen, to take all necessary measures in order to:

- **Ensure that an effective, urgent, thorough and transparent investigation into Wanchalearm's alleged abduction is carried out and keep his family informed of all efforts to determine his whereabouts;**
- **Bring any person suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in a fair trial before an ordinary civilian court and without recourse to death penalty;**
- **As provided by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to which Cambodia is a state party, not to return Wanchalearm to Thailand, in line with your obligations not to engage in the forcible return of individuals to places where they would be at risk of human rights violations.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Wanchalearm's Facebook profile states he is in exile because he supports democracy. Thai authorities filed outstanding charges against him, most recently in 2018 under the Computer Crime Act, alleging that he had posted anti-government material on a Facebook group called "Gu Tong Dai 100 Lan Jak Thaksin Nae Nae (I will certainly receive 100 million from Thaksin.)" They reportedly requested his extradition from Cambodian authorities at the time. They also filed charges against him for failing to report to summons issued in 2014 to a wide range of activists and political figures after the military coup in May of that year.

On 9 June 2020, Cambodian authorities stated to the media that they would initiate an investigation into his disappearance, having earlier told media that they did not know about his case and would not be investigating his alleged abduction.

Wanchalearm Satsaksit is among dozens of political activists from Thailand who have sought asylum in neighbouring countries following political unrest in the country in the last decade. Many left the country after military authorities took power in a coup in May 2014 and issued summons for their political opponents and activists to report to them for interrogation and arbitrary detention. Thai authorities have also repeatedly requested neighbouring governments to return many of these individuals from Thailand to face criminal charges – often for their exercise of the right to freedom of expression online.

There are strong concerns for the safety of Thai exiles in neighbouring countries whose extradition has been sought by the Thai authorities. In recent years, at least eight Thai activists and members of the political opposition have disappeared or been killed in neighbouring countries — including people who made broadcasts in exile opposing the government or monarchy. The eight activists are individuals whose extradition the Thai authorities had repeatedly requested, including on the basis that their broadcasts into Thailand from Laos were a threat to national security.

Neighbouring states – including the Lao and Vietnamese governments – have not exercised due diligence in investigating this pattern of abductions of Thai nationals whose extradition to face charges of lèse majesté had been sought by the Thai authorities. Their whereabouts remain unknown – with the exception of two individuals, whose corpses were found stuffed with concrete in the Mekong river in December 2018. Despite suspicions of official involvement, none of the perpetrators has been identified, and no independent, thorough or effective investigation is known to have taken place.

Amnesty international is also concerned of the possibility that neighbouring authorities – including Cambodia - have colluded with Thailand in recent years in the forcible return of individuals wanted in their respective countries, who would face human rights violations if returned. This includes Cambodians who have fled persecution for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, who have also been forcibly returned from Thailand to Cambodia.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Cambodian/English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 October 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: [Wanchalearm Satsaksit] (he/him)