

URGENT ACTION

STOP PROSECUTING PEACEFUL PROTESTERS

On 22 May 2019, Thai authorities renewed their crackdown on peaceful protesters by pursuing the prosecution of a group of 17 individuals, including an opposition party politician, for their participation in a peaceful protest outside a Bangkok police station on 24 June 2015. Their gatherings took place during the military government's ban on "political" gatherings of five or more persons. Filing charges against these individuals nearly four years after their peaceful demonstration appears to be a politically motivated decision to silence perceived opponents and has a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Thailand.

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

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha
Office of the Prime Minister
Pitsanulok road
Bangkok 10300
Thailand
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Dear Prime Minister,

I write to urge that your government immediately drop charges against the following 17 individuals - **Apiwat Suntararak, Apisit Sapanapan, Chonthicha Jangrew, Jatupat Boonpattaraksa, Payu Boonsopon, Panupong Srithananuwat, Pakorn Areekul, Pornchai Yuanyee, Ratthapol Supasopon, Rangsiman Rome, Songtham Kaewpanpruk, Suhaimee Dulasa, Supachai Pukrongploy, Suvicha Tipangkorn, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, Wasant Sadesit and Worawut Butmatr** - brought solely because of their participation in a peaceful assembly on 24 June 2015 outside Pathumwan police station in Bangkok.

On 22 May 2019 authorities charged the group with sedition and taking part in a public assembly of more than ten persons that threatens to "breach the peace." They would face up to seven and a half years' imprisonment if found guilty. Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the Future Forward Party, would face a further two years' imprisonment for "assisting someone who has committed a serious offence to escape" under Article 189 of the Thai Penal Code, for allegedly giving activist Rangsiman Rome a lift from the police station despite the fact that the protesters were allowed to leave normally.

While your administration has lifted a number of sweeping restrictions imposed on a range of human rights, authorities continue to judicially harass and intimidate critics and political opponents, and criminalise the exercise of the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

In line with Thailand's obligations under international human rights law, I urge you to immediately and unconditionally drop charges against these and all other individuals solely for exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 16 activists (most of them were law students in 2015) had taken part in two peaceful demonstrations in central Bangkok and in Khon Kaen, a province in the north-east of the country, on 22 May 2015, the anniversary of the 2014 military coup. At the time a ban of “political” gatherings of five or more persons imposed by the military government was in place. Following official calls for them to report to police, the students carried out two further peaceful protests on 24 and 25 June 2015 in Bangkok, the first being outside Pathumwan police station. At the time, police officers at that station refused to accept a complaint by the students about being assaulted by police and plain-clothes officers when protesting in Bangkok on 22 May. On 26 June 2015, authorities remanded 14 activists in custody for nearly two weeks and said that criminal charges against them in the name of national security were “necessary to prevent future conflicts in the nation.” While the authorities in 2015 initiated criminal proceedings for sedition against the activists, they took no further action to prosecute them until May 2019.

On 6 April 2019, authorities charged Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit – leader of the Future Forward Party and candidate for the post of Prime Minister in June 2019 – under Article 116 of the Penal Code, governing sedition, Article 215 for an assembly of ten or more people breaching the peace with the same offences, as well as Article 189 of the Penal Code for providing assistance to someone who has committed a serious crime – allegedly for giving activist Rangsiman Rome a lift from the police station after 24 June 2015 protest.

On 22 May 2019, authorities further charged 14 of the activists under Article 116 and Article 215. Two activists – Pakorn Areekul and Worawut Butmatr – were also charged on 11 June 2019. Suhaimee Dulasa, former President of the Federation of Patani Students and Youth (PerMas), also received the same charges on 15 June 2019.

Authorities have arbitrarily detained and filed multiple unjustified criminal proceedings against the 16 pro-democracy activists solely for their participation in a range of peaceful protests to question the military government’s plans for political transition or moves to silence opponents with criminal prosecution. Between December 2016 and May 2019, Jatupat Boonpattaraksa served nearly two and a half years in prison under Article 112 of the Thailand’s lese majeste law simply for sharing a BBC news story on Facebook. Authorities have also harassed and intimidated their family members and instituted charges against others who have provided support or exercised their professional journalistic or legal duties on their behalf, including lawyer Sirikan Charoensiri, aka June, who has represented the activists.

Authorities have also filed unwarranted charges against Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, who is currently the leader of the Future Forward Party – a new political party which won 81 seats in the March 2019 general election. This includes charges against him and fellow party members filed for talking on Facebook about how authorities used the threat of criminal prosecution for political leverage. Authorities have also threatened or instituted further measures to dissolve the Future Forward Party and suspend Thanathorn as a Member of Parliament. Rangsiman Rome also won a parliamentary seat for the Future Forward Party and Worawut Butmatr works for the party.

In December 2018, authorities lifted the repressive four-and-a-half-year criminal ban they had imposed on “political” gatherings of five or more persons, under martial law and subsequently Head of NCPO Order 3/2015, after taking power in a military coup in May 2014. During this time, they also passed the Public Assembly Act which allows criminal sanctions and fines on individuals who do not notify authorities in advance of a protest and limiting places where protests may take place. Authorities are also continuing to prosecute and institute new charges against individuals solely for exercising their right to peaceful assembly.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Thai, or your own language

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 5 August 2019

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:

Apiwat Suntararak (aka Noi) (he/him), Apisit Sapanapan (he/him), Chonthicha Jangrew (she/her), Jatupat Boonpattaraksa (aka Pai) (he/him), Payu Boonsopon (aka payu) (he/him), Panupong Srithanuwat (aka Night) (he/him), Pakorn Areekul (he/him), Pornchai Yuanyee (he/him), Ratthapol Supasopon (he/him), Rangsiman Rome (he/him), Songtham Kaewpanpruk (aka Dave) (he/him), Suhaimee Dulasa (he/him), Supachai Pukrongploy (aka Arty) (he/him), Suvicha Tipangkorn (aka Best) (he/him), Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit (he/him), Wasant Sadesit (aka Tong) (he/him) and Worawut Butmatr (he/him).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA39/2066/2015/en/>