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Thailand: Extrajudicial killing is not the way to suppress drug trafficking

Amnesty International today expressed grave concern about hundreds of reported killings of drug trafficking suspects by the Thai security forces since 1 February 2003 -- the day when Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra announced a "war on drugs". The effect of the government's campaign against drugs trafficking has been a *de facto* shoot-to-kill policy of anyone believed to be involved in the drugs trade.

"It is a sad fact that after 10 years of significant improvement in Thailand's human rights record, the government has now taken a big step backwards. Encouragement for extrajudicial killings has been given at the highest level with law enforcement personnel under heavy pressure to "produce results" or lose their jobs," Amnesty International said.

The government claims that only 15 of the almost 600 shot dead in the past three weeks were killed by the security forces, and the rest were as a result of drug dealers shooting one another. The authorities are not permitting pathologists to perform autopsies and bullets are reportedly being removed from the corpses.

"We recognize that drugs are a major social problem in Thailand and the efforts some government departments are making to rehabilitate drug users. However, drug suspects should be brought to trial, not killed before they have the chance to defend themselves," the international human rights organization commented.

Amnesty International calls upon the Thai Government to immediately send a message to all law enforcement officials that killing of drug or any other criminal suspects is only acceptable in self-defence. The authorities should also initiate independent, impartial, effective, and immediate investigations into the deaths so far.

Background

Amnesty International has expressed concerns for several years about the killings of drug trafficking suspects by the security forces in Thailand. According to police, there are almost never any witnesses to killings of suspected criminals. The police usually claim that the suspects opened fire first, and that they shot back in self-defence. In addition, the authorities have judicially executed many people convicted of drug trafficking offences since they resumed executions in 1996 after a nine year hiatus.

In spite of these ongoing problems, Amnesty International has welcomed many steps the Royal

Thai Government has taken to improve human rights in the Kingdom since 1992. In 1997 the government acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and promulgated a new Constitution which guarantees many fundamental human rights. The provisions of this constitution allow for the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission, which is now fully operational.

Most recently Amnesty International has documented human rights violations in the context of the administration of justice, including torture, and poor prison conditions. Members of ethnic minorities, refugees, and poor people are particularly vulnerable. The Corrections Department have made improvements in the last year and have initiated a human rights training program for prison personnel. However other parts of the government continue to commit human rights violations with apparent impunity.

For more information on human rights in Thailand please visit our website : http://www.web.amnesty.org/ainsf/recent/asa_390032002

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