

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Thailand: Stop Penalizing Peaceful Assembly and Investigate Reports of Excessive Use of Force**

Following the issuing of arrest warrants for 16 peaceful student demonstrators in Thailand, Amnesty International calls on the authorities to withdraw all arrest warrants and charges laid against individuals solely for the exercise of their human right to freedom of peaceful assembly. The organization also urges the authorities to lift restrictions that currently deny the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in the country by criminalizing political gatherings of five or more persons.

Sixteen students have been charged with violating a ban on political activity and holding a public gathering by participating in two peaceful gatherings on 22 May to mark the anniversary of Thailand's military coup – at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre in the country's capital and at the Democracy Monument in Khon Kaen, Northeast Thailand. If prosecuted and found guilty they will face up to one year in prison and fines.

Amnesty International also urges authorities to promptly and thoroughly investigate any incident of unnecessary or excessive use of force by authorities against peaceful protestors and ensure that law enforcement officials who have used force unlawfully face disciplinary, and where appropriate, criminal proceedings.

On 24 June 2015, police officers at Pathumwan Police Station, Bangkok reportedly refused to allow a representative of the student demonstrators to register an official complaint alleging unnecessary and excessive use of force by police and plain-clothes individuals at the demonstration at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre on 22 May 2015. Eye-witnesses reported plain-clothes individuals and police carrying out physical attacks on students. Video clips posted on YouTube appear to confirm these reports. At least three students currently facing charges are reported to have been among those injured, including one who required emergency medical treatment after being found unconscious. Under international human rights law and standards, law-enforcement officials have the obligation to avoid, and, where unavoidable, minimize the use of force. The principles of proportionality and necessity must be applied at all times.

The Khon Kaen Military Court has issued a warrant, dated 23 June 2015, for the arrest of seven students from Khon Kaen University, for their protest on 22 May against the 2014 military coup and the forcible evictions of rural communities affected by extractive and development projects. Warrants have been issued for the arrest of a further nine persons – two of whom have been arrested and released on bail on 23 and 24 June 2015 – for participating in the peaceful protest at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, one of the first sites of spontaneous anti-coup protests in 2014.

Amnesty International renews calls on the Thai authorities to uphold human rights protected by international law and standards including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right, which Thailand has ratified, and the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials. Amnesty International continues to receive reports of on-going violations of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom from torture and other ill-treatment and the right to have an effective remedy for violations.