

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Thailand: Ensure accountability for killing of 17-year-old Lahu activist**

Thai authorities must promptly order an independent and effective investigation into the killing of a youth activist by security officers and ensure that those responsible are held accountable if any human rights violations contributed to his death, said Amnesty International.

On 17 March, Chaiyaphum Pasae, a 17-year-old youth activist from the Lahu indigenous group, was shot and killed at a checkpoint in Chiang Mai Province reportedly staffed by a combined force of soldiers and members of the Pha Muang special forces anti-narcotics and border patrol unit. An army incident report states that Chaiyaphum Pasae fled the car in which he was traveling and was shot as he attempted to throw a grenade at the soldiers. The report states that soldiers subsequently found a large quantity of amphetamine tablets in the car.

Chaiyaphum Pasae was a well-known advocate for the rights of the Lahu people and other indigenous communities in Thailand. He was also an amateur filmmaker and musician, whose work dealt with topics including indigenous rights and statelessness. He had reportedly previously campaigned against drug use within the Lahu community.

The driver of the car in which Chaiyaphum Pasae was traveling was arrested at the scene and transferred to Chiang Mai Provincial Court. At the time of writing he remained in custody.

Amnesty International calls on the Thai government to immediately order an independent, impartial and effective investigation into the killing, and to protect witnesses, community members and family members from intimidation or harassment. The investigation should be carried out by authorities that are independent of those involved in the reported incident. The witness to the killing who has been detained should be released unless he is charged with an internationally recognisable offence and remanded by an independent, civilian court. If he is not released, or pending his release, independent lawyers and family members of the detained individual should immediately be granted access to him, as should the appropriate investigative bodies, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, and other relevant authorities. On no account should officials involved in the killing be granted access to him. Thai authorities should also take all necessary steps to ensure that the witness to the killing is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment while detained. Amnesty urges the Thai government to provide investigating authorities with all necessary resources. The government should also ensure that, if investigations produce sufficient, admissible evidence of offences involving human rights violations against any individuals, the perpetrators of such offences are held accountable through a trial that meets international standards for fairness in a civilian court.

### **Background**

The Lahu people are a linguistically distinct ethnic group spread across Thailand, China, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos. Approximately 150,000 Lahu live in Thailand, primarily as farmers in the northern part of the country.

Chaiyaphum Pasae, also known as "Ja-u" was a 17-year-old student at Chiang Dao Wittayakom School. He frequently participated in events to promote Lahu culture and traditions, including those organized by the Rak Lahu Group.

Chaiyaphum Pasae has contributed to the production of a number of films about human rights and social issues affecting the Lahu people, including statelessness, drugs and land rights concerns. He has also composed songs about problems faced by the Lahu community and led activities to promote Lahu traditional dance.

Chaiyaphum Pasae was killed only days after returning from a forum for youth activists organized by the Child and Youth Media Institute.