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Thailand: Government responds to Amnesty International's concerns

The Thai government has responded to Amnesty International's concerns about the situation in the South, the "drugs war", and the safety of human rights campaigners. They also commented on the use of the death penalty and the rights of refugees. The organization's Secretary-General Irene Khan had requested comments when she visited government ministers in July this year.

"While the Thai government was very cooperative in responding to the organization's concerns, its explanations and suggestions do not go far enough in addressing a number of the issues raised", said Natalie Hill, Amnesty's Deputy Asia Director.

Those who commit human rights abuses, including "disappearances" and unlawful killings, are largely escaping justice. An Amnesty International report published today summarizes these concerns and reflects comments received from the government since the visit.

Amnesty International has repeatedly welcomed improvements in the human rights situation in Thailand after the May 1992 violent military crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators. However the organization has major concerns about the slow pace of these improvements; the deeply flawed justice system; and impunity for the security forces.

Most recently the sharp escalation of violence in the Muslim-dominated South, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people this year, is of particular concern. Beginning in January 2004 attacks in the South by unknown armed groups has led to a deteriorating security situation for both Buddhist and Muslim civilians.

Amnesty International strongly condemns the targeted killings of civilians by unknown armed groups. At the same time the organization is calling on government security forces to uphold human rights. Reliable reports indicate that Thai security forces have committed unlawful killings and torture in the context of the violence in the South.

"The government must act quickly to bring those responsible to justice, otherwise others will be encouraged to follow their example. There is already a worrying climate of impunity among the security forces," said Ms Hill.

Human rights groups in Thailand are flourishing but they face dangers in carrying out their work. Powerful locals may threaten campaigners if their own interests are at risk, and at least 17 activists have

been killed or 'disappeared' in custody over the last two and a half years.

The human rights of people on death row are also being denied. Nine hundred people are living under sentence of death at Bangkwang prison, most of them held continuously in metal shackles.

Background

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan led a delegation to Bangkok from 15 -21 July 2004. The delegation met the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Interior, the Secretary General of the National Security Council, and officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The government provided Amnesty International with statistics on the violence in the South, saying there were 497 'unrest situations' between 4 January - 27 April 2004, resulting in the deaths of 85 civilians, 28 government officials, and three Buddhist monks. It also commented on Amnesty International's concerns about the lack of investigations into the 2,245 deaths during the "drugs war", insisting that all homicides involving government officials had been investigated and that they were found to have used 'legal force'.

To see the report, please go to: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-tha/index>

Public Document

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