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## **Thailand: Military must halt reckless use of lethal force**

Thai soldiers must immediately stop firing live ammunition into several large areas in Bangkok where anti-government protesters are gathered, Amnesty International said today.

“Eye-witness accounts and video recordings show clearly that the military is firing live rounds at unarmed people who pose no threat whatsoever to the soldiers or to others,” said Benjamin Zawacki, Amnesty International’s Thailand specialist. “This is a gross violation of a key human right—the right to life”.

“Deliberately firing live ammunition at unarmed people, whether they be protesters or otherwise and who pose no credible threat to anyone else, is unlawful”, said Zawacki.

Since 13 May, when the government began “Operation Rachaprasong”, soldiers have fired rubber and live rounds in and around protest sites in several parts of Bangkok. The government claims that there are around 500 “terrorists” hiding among the protesters.

At least 35 unarmed protesters have been killed. The dead include two medics who were wearing white medical uniforms with visible red crosses, shot on 15 and 16 May; and a 17 year-old boy, shot on 15 May. Maj. Gen. Khattiya Sawatdiphon (known as “Seh Daeng”), a military advisor for the protesters, was struck by a sniper’s bullet on 14 May and died on 17 May. In addition another soldier has been killed.

Over 200 people have been injured, including several Thai and foreign journalists, and a 10 year-old boy.

“The government cannot allow soldiers to essentially shoot at anyone within an area it wishes to control”, said Zawacki.

The government’s Rules of Engagement, as articulated by its Center for Resolution of Emergency Situation (CRES) on 14 May, state that live rounds may only be used as warning shots fired into the air, in self-defense, or when forces can clearly see those the security forces consider as “terrorists”. On 16 May, CRES declared several areas just adjacent to the protest site as “live fire zones”.

Several eye-witnesses told Amnesty International that they witnessed soldiers shooting into the area using long-range rifles—at a distance from which the victims were not likely to present any danger.

CRES Spokesperson Col. Sansern Kaewkamnerd said on 14 May that troops would keep a distance from the protesters, and would use live ammunition to stop people from coming closer. When shooting to stop protesters, troops would aim below the knee and fire only one bullet at a time.

“This is unacceptable under international law and standards, which provide that firearms may be used only as

a last resort, when a suspected offender offers armed resistance or otherwise jeopardizes the lives of others, and less extreme measures are not sufficient to restrain or apprehend the suspected offender. Outside of clear situations of self-defence, riot control should be performed by trained police using non-lethal equipment, not by soldiers using live ammunition,” said Zawacki.

## Background

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), commonly known as "Red Shirts" for the colour of their clothing, began their protests in Bangkok on 12 March.

Many of them are allied with former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, deposed in a 2006 coup d'état and currently in voluntary exile. They are calling for greater democracy and have consistently demanded the dissolution of Parliament, followed by new elections. They have also at times demanded the resignation and exile of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who on 3 May proposed a five-point Reconciliation Plan, which included the dissolution of Parliament and new elections on 14 November 2010. The protesters initially accepted the plan in principle, but then countered with a "Red Plan" and refused to vacate their protest site, which they have occupied since 3 April.

The Internal Security Act has been in force since the protests began and an Emergency Decree was declared on 7 April; both confer enormous powers on the military, while the latter has been extended to cover nearly half of Thailand.

Thailand has acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides that the right to life cannot be restricted even “in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation (Art. 4).”

Using lethal force recklessly violates international law on the use of force. The United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (1990) and the United Nations Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (1989), while not legally binding per se, represent global agreement by states on how to best implement international human rights provisions during law enforcement operations without violating the right to life. Both are clear that intentional lethal force can only be used when strictly unavoidable to protect life.

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