

Thailand: 11 Years of Injustice for Somchai Neelapaijit while Impunity Continues

(Bangkok, 12 March 2015) - On the 11th Anniversary of the disappearance of Somchai Neelapaijit, a prominent human rights lawyer and former chair of the Muslim Attorney Centre, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) strongly reiterates its call for the government of Thailand to bring the perpetrators responsible for Somchai Neelapaijit's disappearance to justice and further urges the government to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICCPED), as well as adopt long overdue domestic legislation that makes enforced disappearance a crime in Thailand.

As a human rights lawyer, Somchai Neelapaijit defended those who were accused under security charges in three Southern Thai provinces, where the conflict between Thai government and insurgency groups has been ongoing since 2004. He was last seen on 12 March 2004 at Ramkhamhaeng Road, where his car was hit and subsequently forced into another car. Four police officers were acquitted by the Court of Appeal from the charge of forced coercion and robbery in 2011, while another officer who was convicted by the Court of Appeal was reported to have died in a landslide in 2008. His body however, was never found.

Thailand has signed the ICCPED in 2012, but has yet to ratify it. Somchai Neelapaijit's disappearance was certainly not an isolated case in Thailand. In 2014, 'Billy' Polachee Rakjongjaroen, a Karen human rights defender was also "disappeared" after being arrested on 17 April 2014 in Kaengkrachan National Park. Billy was purportedly released, but his whereabouts remain unknown. These are just two examples in a long list of disappearances that have occurred over the years in Thailand and for which families of the disappeared have received neither answers nor justice.

FORUM-ASIA thus strongly urges the government of Thailand to take immediate and serious measures to address the issues of enforced disappearances and impunity in Thailand and to ensure justice for victims and their families as a matter of priority, including by ratifying the ICCPED and criminalising enforced disappearance in the country without any further delays.