

Thailand: Arrest and detention of democracy activists is crude attempt to muffle dissent

(Geneva, 22 January 2016) - The arrest and detention of 4 democracy activists in Bangkok is a crude attempt at muffling dissent, striking fear and infringing basic freedoms including the freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) said today.

Four student activists of the New Democracy Movement (NDM) were arrested by authorities and presented at the Bangkok Military court on Thursday. While the military court dismissed police request for their remand and the activists were released, a separate member of NDM - Abhisit Sarnaphapan - who was protesting outside the military court was later arrested. Abhisit Sarnaphapan will be presented before the military court on Friday.

“The charges against the student activists for exercising their political freedoms are excessive and infringes on their basic rights guaranteed under national and international law,” said Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

“We call for all charges against them to be dropped immediately and request authorities to end this witch-hunt against peaceful protesters. A healthy democracy needs to respect the rights of its citizens to dissent including through peaceful protests.”

On 20 January around 10.30 pm, Sirawith Seritiwat, a member of the NDM and a university student was picked up by unidentified military officers. His lawyers claim that he was also ill-treated – beaten and threatened - while he was being held at an unknown location in the first few hours of his detention.

His exact location - Nimitmai Police station - was only revealed 4 hours later to his lawyers. A few hours later, three other NDM members - Chonthicha Jaeng-rew, Chanoknan Ruamsap, and Kornkoch Saengyenphan, were arrested by police.

On 13 January, the Military court of Bangkok issued arrest warrants against six students – including these four arrested members of NDM as well as Abhisit Sarnaphapan and Thanet Anantawong. They are among 11 activists who have been charged under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Order no. 3/2015 which prohibits political gathering of five or more persons. On 7 December 2015, members of NDM together with activists from Resistance Citizen Group held a peaceful and symbolic protest ‘*let’s take the train to the park*’ calling for investigation into a corruption scandal. Despite the peaceful nature of the protest, authorities responded overzealously arresting 37 protestors, including six NDM student activists.

“Thai authorities should hold up basic freedoms and human rights as enshrined in national law and in accordance to Thailand’s international obligations. We also urge the Government of Thailand to urgently repeal the NCPO Order no. 3/2015 since it contravenes Thailand’s human rights obligations under the

international human rights laws including International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)” said Evelyn Balais-Serrano.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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