

Thailand: Urgent call to dismiss all allegations against the eight human rights defenders from the peaceful march, 'We Walk'

(Geneva, 26 January 2018) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) urgently calls on the Government of Thailand to unconditionally dismiss all allegations against the eight human rights defenders who joined the peaceful march, 'We Walk' on 20 January 2018. A few days later, on 23 January 2018, authorities issued police summons for them, for allegedly violating the ban on political gatherings. While the police summons are in accordance with Article 12 of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Order No. 3/2015, they, and the NCPO Order itself, are a violation of the fundamental right to peaceful gatherings and demonstrations, which is guaranteed under Article 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Thailand has ratified.

The People Go Network, a loose grouping of civil society organisations and grassroots movements, launched a peaceful march from Bangkok Suburb to Khon Kaen Province, covering a distance of 450 kilometres. On the first day, 20 January 2018, more than 150 people participated. The march was intended to last for 28 days. The objective of the march was to raise awareness on: the increasing suppression of the right to freedom of expression; and lack of inclusive development in areas such as community rights, natural resources, and food and health security.

The organisers had requested permission for the march from the authorities, but this was not granted. Still, they took all necessary precautions as required by law. Despite the peaceful nature of the march, organisers and participants received various threats and were intimidated by the Thai authorities. A group of participants of the march were blocked from leaving the starting point at Thammasat University for around seven hours. Plainclothes officials surveilled all marchers, taking their pictures and demanding to examine their ID cards.

On 21 January, four marchers were detained by the authorities without informing them of the charges against them and denying them access to consult with a lawyer. They were released without charges on the same day.

Due to all disruptions and derailing by the authorities, on 22 January, the People Go Network decided to file a lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the Royal Thai Police for disrupting and intimidating the 'We Walk' peaceful march. However, the Court dismissed the lawsuit on the same day for lack of evidence.

The following day, on 23 January, Thai authorities issued arrest warrants for eight participants, specifically: Lertsak Khamkongsak, Assistant Professor Anusorn Unno, Nimit Tien-udom, Somchai Krajangsaeng, Saengsiri Trimankha, Nuchanart Tantong, Ubon Yuwa and Jamnong Nuphan, to present themselves at the

Klong Luang Police Station in Pathum Thani Province. They are accused of breaching Article 12 of NCPO Order No. 3/2015, which prohibits the gathering of five or more people for political purposes. If the eight human rights defenders fail to comply with the warrants, second warrants will be issued. If they choose to ignore these as well, arrest warrants will be issued.

Additionally, there are concerns that authorities will continue to interfere and harass the marchers until they reach Khon Kaen on 17 February 2018.

Since the 2014 coup d'état by the Military, fundamental freedoms that include freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, have been obstructed by the Thai authorities. An increasing number of human rights defenders in Thailand face both physical and judicial harassments from the Military Government, which are aimed at suppressing political dissent.

FORUM-ASIA calls on the Thai authorities to dismiss all allegations against the eight human rights defenders. FORUM-ASIA also reiterates its request to the Thai authorities to unconditionally revoke NCPO Order No. 3/2015 as it is in violation of international human rights standards, and calls for an end to the military rule and for a return to democracy.

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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