



Thailand: Release human rights defender Mongkorn ‘BusBas’ Thirakot, repeal royal defamation law

(Bangkok, 25 January 2023) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, and Asia Democracy Network (ADN) strongly condemn the [conviction](#) of Mongkorn ‘BusBas’ Thirakot, a 30-year-old activist and online clothing retailer from Chiang Rai.

BusBas has been sentenced to an unprecedented [50 years in prison](#)—the longest in Thailand’s history—for his remarks on the monarchy. This marks the most severe sentence ever issued under Thailand’s draconian lèse-majesté (royal defamation) law, surpassing the previous record set in 2021 when a [woman](#) received a 43-year sentence.

Civic space in Thailand was rated as ‘repressed’ by the [CIVICUS Monitor](#).

Our organisations express solidarity with BusBas and all pro-democracy defenders in Thailand. We call upon the Thai authorities to release activists, to repeal the lèse-majesté law, and to refrain from further undermining people’s fundamental rights and freedoms.

Suppressing Freedom of Expression

Arrested in April 2021, Bas was initially sentenced to 28 years in January for 14 counts of royal defamation for Facebook posts he made three years ago. On 18 January 2024, the Appeals Court affirmed the original conviction and added 11 more violations to his charges. For each violation, a 3-year imprisonment term was imposed. Considering the defendant’s cooperation, a one-third reduction was granted, culminating in a total of 22 years in prison under Article 112 of Thailand’s criminal code over his 27 Facebook posts. When combined with the initial 28-year sentence from the Court of First Instance, the overall sentence stands at 50 years of imprisonment.

Lèse-majesté, also known as the offence of injury to royalty, is stipulated in Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code. This statute specifies that making defamatory, insulting, or threatening remarks about the king, queen, or regent can result in a maximum penalty of 15 years for each alleged violation.

According to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, at least [262 individuals](#) have faced charges related to lèse-majesté since 2020. This surge in legal actions coincided with unprecedented youth-led street protests wherein protest leaders openly criticised the monarchy.

‘Thailand as a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) must respect and protect fundamental freedoms for all individuals. We reiterate our call to repeal Article 112 and all other laws used to curtail free speech. Likewise, we demand an immediate and unconditional release of all detainees held in prison under this act. The Thai Government must ensure a secure and supportive environment for all human rights defenders to exercise their basic freedoms as outlined in the ICCPR,’ the organisations stressed.

Overturn the Conviction

FORUM-ASIA, CIVICUS, and ADN are urging the Thai Government to overturn BusBas' conviction. We demand the immediate release of BusBas, pro-democracy activist [Arnon Nampa](#), and all other human rights defenders in Thailand.

In addition, we endorse the call for the abolition of the lèse-majesté law as its contents and enforcement are in conflict with international human rights standards.

In the first place, individuals exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly should never be criminalised and silenced. Laws that unfairly shield public figures from criticisms and suppress political dissent have no place in a vibrant civic space.

We call on the Government of Thailand to fulfil its international obligations by upholding the people's right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

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