



[Statement] Thailand: Justice for Bung Sanesangkhom, stop harassment against dissent

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), Focus on the Global South, Front Line Defenders, Asia Democracy Network are profoundly saddened and outraged by the tragic death of Netiporn 'Bung' Sanesangkhom, a young activist who peacefully and courageously fought for justice and monarchy reform in Thailand.

Bung was a member of the protest group Thalu Wang, which advocates for the amendment of Thailand's royal defamation (*lèse-majesté*) law, which has been frequently used to punish anyone who is perceived to defame, insult, or threaten the Thai monarchy.

On 14 May 2024, Bung suffered from cardiac arrest and died while under the care of the Correctional Department, raising criticisms on the quality of treatments she received during such a critical time before being transferred from prison to the Thammasat University Hospital in Pathum Thani province.

Bung's detention stemmed from her conviction for contempt of court on 26 January 2024, where she was sentenced to one month in prison. However, on the same day, the Court revoked her bail in another *lèse-majesté* case filed in relation to a 2022 protest where she held up a banner at a shopping mall in Bangkok, questioning whether or not the royal motorcades caused inconvenience to the public.

This revocation highlights the severe and oppressive actions taken against individuals who exercise their freedom of expression and right to protest.

Using the *lèse-majesté* law against human rights defenders and critics

On 27 January 2024, following her conviction, Bung initiated a partial hunger strike to demand justice system reforms. Bung hoped for the Thai Government to stop imprisoning dissenting voices.

This is not the first time that a *lèse-majesté* defendant passed away while in detention. On 8 May 2012, [Amphon Tangnoppakhun](#) passed away a few months into his 20-year sentence. Despite weak evidence, he was found guilty of sending disrespectful text messages about Queen Sirikit.

Bung's death serves as a reminder of the tragic and inhumane consequences of the *lèse-majesté* law as well as the government's disregard for political detainees' right to bail, including those who have not been found guilty by a final judgment but dare to challenge systems.

The Thai Government must listen to the increasing demands from its own people as well as the international community to repeal the *lèse-majesté* law.

The *lèse-majesté* law has been used as a political tool to silence human rights defenders and critics of the Thai Government. In 2020, massive protests demanding monarchy reforms erupted in Thailand. Between November 2020 and May 2024, at least 272 people have been charged under the *lèse-majesté* law, according to the group [Thai Lawyers for Human Rights](#).

Even prior to Bung's death, the *lèse-majesté* law continued to threaten the Thai people's right to express political opinions. On 14 March 2024, a social media user was [sentenced to 50 years in prison](#) for posting their sentiments regarding the monarchy online. Out of the 18 social media posts in question, 14 led to charges under the *lèse-majesté* law, while four were charged under the Computer Crime Act, which enables authorities to block or remove illegal or inappropriate websites and content, exerting significant control over people's right to free speech and internet freedom. Its application has led to widespread self-censorship and a decrease in online discussions of 'sensitive' issues. The accused had been under pre-trial detention for 144 days before receiving their first court of instance's sentence. The sentence was reduced to 25 years after a guilty plea.

Among many other prominent pro-democracy defenders, [Arnon Nampa](#) has been sentenced to four years in prison without parole, in September 2023 for violating the *lèse-majesté* law for a remark about monarchy during a pro-democracy rally in 2020. In January 2024, he was sentenced to four years in prison for royal defamation in connection with a social media post made in 2021. In April 2024, he received an [additional two-year](#) sentence for royal insult, bringing his total prison time to ten years. Meanwhile, former civil servant [Anchan](#) was convicted for 29 counts under the said law, resulting in an 87-year imprisonment which was later reduced by half following her guilty plea.

A coalition of civil society groups and activists in Thailand has put forward the 'Amnesty for People Bill,' which seeks to cease politically-motivated prosecutions and resolve pending legal cases related to political expression.

The bill advocates for comprehensive amnesty for individuals facing charges stemming from Thailand's political turmoil which has witnessed several protests and calls for reform since September 2006 when the country's military coup ousted the former civilian government. Public hearing on the bill is underway.

Call to action

We urge the Government of Thailand to carry out a thorough, independent, and credible investigation to determine the cause and circumstances of Bung's death while under the custody of the Department of Corrections. Autopsy findings should be promptly published.

Political detainees who have not been convicted by a final judgment should be granted the right to bail.

We are calling on Thai authorities to support the proposed People's Amnesty Bill as it is crucial for the government to provide amnesty to individuals facing political persecution for simply exercising their freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly.

We are also encouraging the international community to monitor the trial of Thai human rights defenders and activists involved in *lèse-majesté* cases, helping ensure that their fundamental rights are upheld.