



Regional Office for South-East Asia

PRESS RELEASE

Criminal Defamation Case against Loei Human Rights Defenders

BANGKOK (31 October 2014) – The United Nations Human Rights Office for South East Asia (OHCHR) is seriously concerned that criminal defamation is being used in Thailand as a means to pressure human rights defenders. In the latest example on 29 October, the Phuket Provincial Court decided to proceed with a criminal defamation suit against Mr. Surapan Rujichaiwat from Loei province in north-eastern Thailand. The suit has been brought by Tungkum Company Limited, a mining company. It has also brought a number of other civil and criminal cases against members of the Khon Rak Ban Koed Group (KRBK), including Ms. Porntip Hongchai, who is due to appear at the same court on 3 November on criminal defamation charges. The criminal defamation cases followed the 15 May incident in which a group of armed men attacked and injured more than 20 villagers, including members of the KRBK, who were blockading the transportation of minerals.

OHCHR is concerned by the continuation of the lawsuit as it appears that it is being used to silence those who raise legitimate issues publicly and echoes a trend of the use of defamation suits against human rights defenders. OHCHR is aware of at least five other human rights defenders facing criminal defamation cases for raising issues such as trafficking, labour rights and torture.

The criminalisation of defamation has a chilling effect and can unduly restrict freedom of expression. Human rights defenders need the full protection of the state to carry out their work without fear of criminal prosecution. We urge the Government of Thailand to carefully review such cases and ensure the full compliance with international human rights standards.

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The Regional Office for South-East Asia in Bangkok represents the High Commissioner for Human Rights within South East Asia. The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal human rights official of the United Nations and heads the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which spearheads the United Nations' human rights efforts .

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