

## UN expert dismayed over Thai leader's intimidating statements against freedom of the press

GENEVA (1 April 2015) – United Nations expert on freedom of expression David Kaye today urged the Government of Thailand to unequivocally distance itself from the Thai's leader intimidating statements against freedom of the press, and take immediate measures to allow space for debate and freedom of expression.

General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the leader of the coup that deposed the elected government of Thailand and assumed powers as Prime Minister in 2014, has said recently that journalists who criticize him or 'causes divisions' could be subjected to execution, and that he enjoys 'the power to close down the media, arrest people, order for people to be shot.'

"I condemn General Prayuth's statements categorically," the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression stressed. "After a year of killings and terrible violence against journalists worldwide, such statements are simply outrageous".

The Special Rapporteur noted that he receives reports from all over the world about attacks, killings and record numbers of journalists imprisoned, "designed to silence criticism and deny citizens the right of access to information."

"Journalists of all kinds perform one of the most fundamental tasks in a democratic society, throwing light on whether and how Governments behave in accordance with the rule of law or engage in corruption and human rights abuses," he said. "Intimidation of journalists is by definition an attack on the public's right to know."

"There is no sense that General Prayuth spoke in jest," the expert said. "But even if he did, the idea that the killing of journalists – let alone the shutting down of media in light of criticism – can be a laughing matter is reprehensible."

The Special Rapporteur stated that Thailand should take immediate steps to lift the nationwide imposition of martial law, while expressing strong concerns about possible invocation of section 44 of the Interim Constitution that would further provide General Prayuth an unlimited authority to issue legislative, executive or judicial order.

"Freedom of expression and independent journalism, uninhibited by fear of reprisals, contribute to public debate and are essential for building inclusive societies and democracies," Mr. Kaye said. "This includes the right of everyone's to express criticism of public authorities."

"Not only Governments and public officials should exhibit respect for the role of journalists, but actually should publicly condemn all forms of threats and attacks against journalists at the

highest political level and ensure no one is subject to intimidations,” the human rights expert stressed.

The Special Rapporteur also expressed concerned with the increasing arrests and detentions under *lese majesté* law and Computer Crime Act, and called for an end to the criminalization of dissenting opinions. “This is particularly crucial now at the moment of drafting the new Constitution, which will shape the future of the country,” the expert concluded.

ENDS

**David Kaye (USA)** was appointed as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression in August 2014 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. Learn more, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomOpinion/Pages/OpinionIndex.aspx>

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