



Regional Office for South-East Asia

PRESS RELEASE

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ADVOCATING FOR LAND RIGHTS KILLED IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

BANGKOK (13 FEBRUARY 2015) - The United Nations Human Rights Office for South East Asia (OHCHR) urges the Government to promptly investigate the killing of a land rights activist in the south of Thailand and increase security measures for the members of his community.

On 11 February, Mr. Chai Bunthonglek, a land rights activist and a member of Khlong Sai Pattana community in Surat Thani province was shot and killed by two unidentified assailants at his residence. Reportedly, the two men came to his residence, riding on a Honda motorcycle without a license plate. The men asked for Mr. Chai. One of them allegedly shot him six times at his chest and head. Mr. Chai passed away at the scene.

Mr. Chai is the fourth member of the Khlong Sai Pattana community murdered since 2010. He had been involved in seeking community land title over land that a company operating a large scale palm oil plantation continues to use despite the expiry of the lease granting them the land. In November, the Supreme Court ruled against the company in a case brought by the Agricultural Land Reform Office. Allegedly in relation to these disputes, three other land rights activists and members of the community were killed, Mr. Somporn Pattanaphum in 2010 and Ms. Montha Chukaew and Ms. Pranee Boonrat in 2012. Despite the police investigation, no one has been brought to justice for these murders.

Alarmingly, Mr. Chai is also the fourth human rights defender who works on land rights in the south of Thailand that has been killed since May 2014. Mr. Krissada Jirapun, a lawyer who had been supporting landless farmers, was shot dead in Phattalung province in May 2014. Mr. Pitan Thongpanang, who had been leading protests against a mining operation in Nakhon Si Thammarat province, was shot and killed on 30 November. Mr. Somsuk Kokrang was fatally shot at a palm oil plantation on 3 December, while leading a campaign to investigate the legality of the plantation in Krabi. These murders exemplify the risks that human rights defenders advocating for land rights are facing.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Thailand is under an obligation to uphold the right to life and to provide adequate protection to those at risk and to investigate any violation. As a member of the United Nations, the Royal Thai Government should take all necessary measures to protect everyone against violence, threats, retaliation and other abuses because of his or her legitimate work as a human rights defender, in line with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. OHCHR calls for a prompt and impartial investigations of this latest death, as well as the previous cases in which human rights defenders have been killed in Thailand. OHCHR further reiterates its call to relevant authorities to implement protection measures for human rights defenders working on land rights in the country, who appear to be particularly vulnerable to attacks and killing.

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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 .

OHCHR website: <http://www.ohchr.org>

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