



Regional Office for South-East Asia

PRESS STATEMENT

United Nations Human Rights Office urges Thailand to drop charges against Phuketwan journalists

BANGKOK (14 JULY 2015) - The United Nations Human Rights Office for South-East Asia (OHCHR) is highly concerned with the ongoing trials of two *Phuketwan* journalists for reporting on smuggling of Rohingya and the alleged involvement of the Royal Thai Navy in Southern Thailand.

From 14 to 16 July, Mr. Alan Morison and Ms. Chutima Sidasathian will be standing trial at the Phuket Provincial Court for publishing an article which quoted an investigative report by Reuters on the smuggling of Rohingya asylum seekers. The charges were filed by the Royal Thai Navy. The article was published in *Phuketwan*, a small English-language newspaper based in Phuket on 17 July 2013. The two journalists face charges of criminal defamation and violation of the Computer Crime Act. If convicted, Mr. Morison and Ms Sidassathian face up to five years in prison.

Phuketwan has been a leading source of information on the plight of Rohingya asylum seekers since 2008. International human rights standards uphold the right of journalists and others to disseminate information that is of legitimate public interest. In April 2015, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression raised concern that there have been increasing arrests and prosecutions under the Computer Crime Act and called for an end to criminalization of dissenting opinions.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Thailand has the obligation to uphold the right to freedom of expression (article 19). The UN Human Rights Committee has outlined that “[s]tates parties should consider the decriminalization of defamation” and “the application of criminal law should only be countenanced in the most serious of cases and imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty”.

OHCHR urges the Thai authorities to drop the charges against the two journalists. Freedom of the press, including freedom for journalists to operate without fear of reprisals, is essential in promoting transparency and accountability on issues of public interest.

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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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