



Regional Office for South-East Asia

PRESS STATEMENT

United Nations Human Rights Office urges the Royal Thai Government to expedite the investigation into the disappearance of a prominent Karen human rights defender

BANGKOK (16 APRIL 2015) - The United Nations Human Rights Office for South-East Asia (OHCHR) reiterated concerns about the lack of progress in the investigation on the enforced disappearance of Mr. Pholachi Rakchongcharoen (also known as Billy), a prominent Karen human rights defender.

Tomorrow, 17 April, will mark one year since the disappearance of Billy, who had been defending the rights of Karen community in the Kaeng Krachan National Park in central Thailand.

Billy was last sighted on his way back from a meeting with community representatives to discuss a lawsuit concerning the burning of homes and properties of Karen villagers by Kaeng Krachan National Park officials in 2010 and 2011. Billy's fate and whereabouts have been unknown since then.

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) has been closely monitoring the case. As of today, the information provided by the Government is insufficient to clarify the fate or whereabouts of Billy and the case remains under the review of the Working Group.

According to credible and reliable sources, new reports from the investigation suggest that Billy was not released from official custody after he was arrested for illegal possession of wild honey. This is in contradiction with the previous claim by the former chief of the National Park that Billy was only briefly detained.

In light of this new development, OHCHR urges the Royal Thai Government, as a signatory to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to allocate sufficient resources and strengthen its efforts to undertake a transparent and thorough investigation into this case. In this regard, the Royal Thai Government should take measures to ensure that witnesses involved in the investigation are protected against intimidation, harassment and reprisal. OHCHR also encourages the Royal Thai Government to provide Billy's family and the WGEID with an update on the most recent findings.

Billy's disappearance has intimidated other human rights defenders, especially those working on land and community rights, as well as those defending rights of ethnic minorities across the country. It is imperative for the Royal Thai Government to provide the maximum protection to these individuals and groups to allow them to safely carry out their activities.

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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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