



Regional Office for South-East Asia

PRESS RELEASE

OHCHR URGES THAILAND TO RELEASE STUDENTS

BANGKOK (30 JUNE 2015) - The United Nations Human Rights Office for South East Asia (OHCHR) urges the Government to promptly drop criminal charges against students who have been arrested in Bangkok for peacefully demonstrating in public and release them from custody. It further urges the Government to review its use of laws that limit freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in line with its obligations under international human rights law.

On 26 June, police and soldiers arrested 14 students in Bangkok based on a warrant issued by the military court for allegedly inciting unrest under section 116 of the Criminal Code. The charges relate to a demonstration held by the students at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok on 25 June. Section 116 carries a maximum sentence of seven years in prison.

The students already had arrest warrants issued against them for having conducted peaceful demonstrations in Bangkok and Khon Kaen on 22 May to mark the first anniversary of the coup d'état, allegedly in breach of Order No. 3/2015 of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). The NCPO Order prohibits political gatherings of more than five people with a maximum sentence of six months in prison.

Another two students appeared at the military court in Bangkok on 29 June for breaching the NCPO order for participating in the 22 May demonstrations. One reported himself to the police on 22 June and was later released on bail. The other student was arrested at hospital based on a warrant while she was receiving medical treatment.

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) and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (article 21). Although both articles allow the rights to be restricted, any restriction has to be by law, necessary for a legitimate purpose and proportional to achieve the need. OHCHR is concerned that criminal prosecutions for peaceful assembly and expression that carry long prison terms are not necessary or proportional.

On 23 May 2014, a day after the coup d'état, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights publicly expressed serious concern about the restrictions on fundamental freedoms imposed by the NCPO, adding that freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are particularly important in resolving difficult political issues through dialogue and debate. Now more than one year on, despite pledges by the Government to promptly restore the rule of law, restrictions on fundamental freedoms remain in place.

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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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