



Index: ASA 39/0634/2019

Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan  
Government House  
1 Pitsanulok Road  
Dusit  
Bangkok 10300  
Thailand

02 July 2019

Dear Deputy Prime Minister,

**INVESTIGATE VIOLENT ATTACKS ON ACTIVISTS AND PROTECT RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY**

On behalf of Amnesty International, I am writing to ask you to take action to protect peaceful political activists, and, in particular, to ensure that recent violent attacks by unknown perpetrators against activists Sirawith Seritiwat, Anurak Jeantawanich, and Ekachai Hongkangwan are properly investigated. Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the safety and security of these and other activists and urges the Thai authorities to take all necessary steps to protect them from harm.

The scale of the attacks against political activists and human rights defenders in Thailand is alarming. Ekachai, for example, has faced nine separate violent attacks by unknown perpetrators, of which the suspected perpetrator in only one attack has been identified. We note, moreover, that the attacks against them appear to fit a pattern of systematic violence timed to coincide with their efforts to draw attention to perceived election irregularities and problems relating to the formation of a new government. They and other activists have also reported receiving threats of physical harm and harassment linked to their activism. We respectfully request your government to publicly condemn these threats and attacks, to exercise due diligence to prevent them, and to investigate and punish them.

Given the apparent failures to date to identify suspected perpetrators in the attacks detailed below, Amnesty International calls on your government to make public information on the progress and findings of any investigations, and to share information with the victims on the methods and procedures to investigate attacks in a prompt and consistent manner.

Amnesty International also renews calls on your government to safeguard individuals' ability to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful protest without fear of harassment, retaliation, or reprisal and to stop using criminal charges to interfere with these rights. We note that the three activists face multiple criminal proceedings for having exercised their rights to free expression and peaceful protest, including under charges of sedition, violating the Public Assembly Act, and violating the ban on "political" gatherings of five or more persons, all of which charges constitute unjustifiable interferences with their rights to freedom of expression and association.

In April 2019, the authorities initiated new criminal proceedings against Anurak under the Computer Crimes Act for criticising the government in a Facebook post, and against Sirawith for defamation, because of a signature campaign to impeach election commissioners. Amnesty International reiterates calls on your government to immediately drop criminal proceedings against these men and also to expunge Anurak Jeantawanich's conviction for violating the ban on "political" gatherings of five or more persons.

Ekachai Hongkangwan has reported nine separate assaults against him to the Royal Thai Police, of which only one has led to a prosecution. He further reports that police have yet to secure evidence of attacks, including video footage that apparently exists. Other activists have reported not having consistent timely updates on the status of investigations into attacks against them. According to reports, at least one victim of attacks has had to make multiple requests to police to secure evidence and provided video evidence of his own volition without receiving police requests.

We therefore urge the Royal Thai Government to carry out prompt, effective, impartial and independent investigations into all incidents detailed below, and to prosecute those suspected of responsibility for these attacks in trials that meet international standards of fairness.

## 2019 ATTACKS ON ACTIVISTS

28 June 2019

At approximately 10.30 am, four unidentified men assaulted activist **Sirawith Seritiwat** near his home in Bangkok. The four, who were wearing helmets and were armed with baseball bats, arrived on motorcycles without numberplates. Seritiwat lost consciousness as a result of the attack.

2 June 2019

Five unidentified men on motorcycles beat **Sirawith Seritiwat** on the head with wooden sticks at a bus stop on Rachadapisek road, Bangkok, at 10 pm. He was hospitalised with head injuries as a result. The attack took place on the day that he collected signatures in central Bangkok for a petition to the senate relating to their vote on a new prime minister.

25 May 2019

A day after **Anurak Jeantawanich** posted his plans on Facebook to hold a demonstration on 25 May to protest the selection of the Speaker of the House of Representative, he left his house to attend the demonstration on his motorcycle. At about 7 am six unidentified men riding on two motorcycles knocked him off his vehicle on a road near his house in Samut Prakan Province. The men beat him on his head and body with a metal pipe. He was hospitalised for several days because of injuries sustained in the attack.

12 May 2019

Five men attacked activist **Ekachai Hongkangwan** outside Bangkok Criminal Court at 8.30 am, beating him badly.

1 April 2019 and 31 March 2019

On the night of 31 March, after **Anurak Jeantawanich** and **Ekachai Hongkangwan** had participated in, and organized, a demonstration to collect signatures for a petition to dissolve the Election Commission, two men attacked Anurak Jeantawanich with wooden staves in his house. In the early hours of 1 April, unknown individuals carried out an arson attack on Ekachai Hongkangwan's vehicle, which was parked outside his residence in Lad Pao, Bangkok.

5 March 2019

After **Ekachai Hongkangwan** went to a hearing at the Public Health Ministry to discuss a report he had made of a medical worker's alleged incitement of violence and hate speech, two unidentified attackers riding an unregistered motorcycle hit him in his head and body with wooden sticks.

26 January 2019

Unknown perpetrators set **Ekachai Hongkangwan's** car on fire outside his residence in Lad Pao, Bangkok.

19 January 2019

At about 7 pm, after **Ekachai Hongkangwan** participated in a peaceful protest calling for the general elections not to be delayed, three men in motorcycle helmets attacked and beat him and a companion, near Thammakaset University in Bangkok. Shortly before the attack Ekachai had dined with individuals who had identified themselves as officers with the Royal Thai Army's Internal Security Operations Command.

In addition, Ekachai Hongkangwan was subjected to at least four violent attacks during 2018 while or around the time he engaged in peaceful protests either about official misconduct or at Government House in Bangkok.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these matters. We would be delighted to meet with you to discuss them and remain at your disposal for any further information that you might require.

Sincerely yours,

Nicholas Bequelin  
Regional Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific

Cc: Commissioner General, Royal Thai Police