

General Prayut Chan-ocha
Prime Minister of Thailand
Government House
Pitsanulok Road, Dusit
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

Milan, 19 July 2018

Your Excellency,

I write in my capacity as the President of the European Association of Southeast Asian Studies (EuroSEAS) to express sincere concern over the prosecution of a group of five scholars and students in connection with their attendance at the 2017 International Conference on Thai Studies. I respectfully urge you to direct the appropriate authorities to drop any charges against them, and, pending this, to ensure that the case against them otherwise proceeds in a manner consistent with Thailand's obligations under international law.

In August 2017, Thai authorities summoned two professors, two students, and one independent intellectual to the Chang Phuak Police Station in Chiang Mai, and accused them of violating an order issued by the National Council for Peace and Order, No. 3/2558, which bans political gatherings of five or more persons. The accusation stems from their attendance at the 13th International Conference on Thai Studies, held from July 15-18, 2017, in Chiang Mai, which brought together scholars from diverse fields to discuss a range of topics, including those related to Thailand's military rule. Attendees at the 2017 conference reported a heavy presence of uniformed and plainclothes military and police; in response, the accused displayed a banner that read, "An academic seminar is not a military base" (translated from Thai). The accused include: Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Associate Professor and Director, Regional Center for Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University, and Organizer, 13th International Conference on Thai Studies; Chaipong Samnieng, Ph.D. Candidate and Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Chiang Mai University; Teeramon Buangam, M.A. Candidate, Faculty of Mass Communication, Chiang Mai University, and Editor, Prachaham News; Nontawat Machai, undergraduate student, Faculty of Mass Communication, Chiang Mai University; and Pakavadi Veerapasong, independent writer and translator.

On July 4, 2018, the accused appeared in Chiang Mai District Court and were charged with violating NCPO Order No. 3/2558 for their expressive activities at the July 2017 conference. If convicted, they would be subject to imprisonment of up to six months, a fine of up to 10,000 baht (roughly USD \$300), or both.

On behalf of EuroSEAS, I welcome any additional information that may explain these events or clarify our understandings. The facts as described suggest that these individuals are being prosecuted as a result of the nonviolent exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and academic freedom – conduct that is expressly protected under international human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Thailand is a party. Criminal investigations and prosecutions in connection with such activity raise serious concerns about protection for academic freedom, the higher education space, and democratic society generally in Thailand.

EuroSEAS therefore respectfully urge you to direct the appropriate authorities to drop any charges against the accused arising out of the non-violent exercise of the rights to expression, association, or academic freedom; and, pending this, to ensure that the case against them otherwise proceeds in a manner consistent with Thailand's obligations under international law.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely Yours,



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