

26 July 2017

Thailand: Environmental rights group charged for holding a peaceful gathering against mining activities

On 25 July 2017, seven human rights defenders belonging to the **Khon Rak Ban Kerd Group (KRBKG)** were charged in Thai Northern province of Loei for allegedly violating the Public Assembly Act and intimidating public officials. **Pornthip Hongchai, Wiron Ruchichaiwat, Ranong Kongsanen, Mon Khunna, Suphat Khunna, Bunraeng Srithong and Lumplearn Ruengrith** were indicted for their involvement in a peaceful gathering held on 16 November 2016 to protest against the extension of a gold mining concession on preserved-forest land to Tungkum. Co Ltd. The preliminary hearing on the case is set to be held in Loei Provincial Court on 11 August 2017.

[Khon Rak Ban Kerd Group](#), which translates as “People who love their home”, is a community-based group working to address environmental rights violations arising from the negative impacts of the open-pit copper-gold mine in Thailand’s Loei province. It has held several peaceful gatherings in the area. Its members have repeatedly been targeted with judicial harassment, both from the mining company Tungkum. Co Ltd as well as from local authorities.

On 25 July 2017, Loei’s Provincial Office of Attorney approved the indictment of Pornthip Hongchai, Wiron Ruchichaiwat, Ranong Kongsanen, Mon Khunna, Suphat Khunna, Bunraeng Srithong and Lumplearn Ruengrith under the Public Assembly Act. According to the police, the women did not inform the authorities about a gathering they held on 16 November 2016 in front of the Wang Saphung District Administration Office, in Loei province. Between 100 and 200 community members gathered peacefully to protest a local meeting held to authorise the concession of protected land for gold mining to Tungkum. Co Ltd. Members of the local administrative council subsequently called off the scheduled meeting and filed a complaint with the police.

The indictment comes only a few days after the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) [expressed](#) serious concern that women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Thailand, particularly those advocating for land rights and the protection of the environment, have increasingly become targets of lawsuits, harassment, violence and intimidation by authorities and business enterprises due to their work.

The land and environmental rights defenders are all from villages located in the Wang Saphung District, where there has been a long-standing dispute between local communities and open-pit mining operator Tungkum Co. Ltd. Three of the seven women charged – Wiron Ruchichaiwat, Pornthip Hongchai and Mon Khunna – had previously been targeted by a defamation lawsuit brought by Tungkum, until the Loei Provincial Court dismissed the case on 30 March 2016.

The preliminary hearing on the case is set to be held in Loei Provincial Court on 11 August 2017. If found guilty, the seven human rights defenders could each face a fine of 10,000 baht (about 250 euros).

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of human rights defenders Pornthip

Hongchai, Wiron Ruchichaiwat, Ranong Kongsarn, Mon Khunna, Suphat Khunna, Bunraeng Srithong and Lumplearn Ruengrith, which it believes is solely motivated by the legitimate exercise of their freedom of expression, as well as their freedom of peaceful assembly and association in Loei Province.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Thailand to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Khon Rak Ban Kerd Group members Pornthip Hongchai, Wiron Ruchichaiwat, Ranong Kongsarn, Mon Khunna, Suphat Khunna, Bunraeng Srithong and Lumplearn Ruengrith, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Thailand are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders condemns this act of intimidation against human rights defender XXXX, which it believes is solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate work for human rights in XXXXX.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in XXX to:

- 1.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (b and c): “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; (c) To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters”, and to Article 16: “Individuals, non-governmental organizations and relevant institutions have an important role to play in contributing to making the public more aware of questions relating to all human rights and fundamental freedoms through activities such as education, training and research in these areas to strengthen further, inter alia, understanding, tolerance, peace and friendly relations among nations and among all racial and religious groups, bearing in mind the various backgrounds of the societies and communities in which they carry out their activities.

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director