

9 December 2015

Thailand: Human rights defenders detained en-route to an anti-corruption protest

On 7 December 2015 Mr **Sirawith Serithiwat** along with more than twenty activists from the **Resistant Citizen** group were detained by military officers and police at Ban Pong Train Station in Ratchaburi Province while travelling to Rajabhakti Park to carry out a demonstration against alleged military corruption.

Sirawit Serithiwat is a student human rights defender from Thammasat University and a pro-democracy activist. The excursion was organised by Resistant Citizen and several well-known pro-democracy activists, including lawyer **Anon Numpa** to investigate the corruption scandal surrounding Rajabhakti Park which was constructed by the Thai military. The military has denied any financial wrongdoing over the construction of the park, which is currently under investigation over alleged improper payments.

On 7 December at approximately 10 am, the authorities detached the train compartment en-route to Rajabhakti Park and forcibly removed some of the activists from the carriage before taking them into custody for questioning. Later that evening all the activists were released. General Prayut Chan-o-cha, the junta leader and Prime Minister, told media that the authorities only barred the activists in order to prevent conflict and confrontation with other political groups. He then continued to say that he cannot guarantee safety for anyone who is demanding a probe into the Rajabhakti Park corruption scandal.

On 5 December 2015 Thai military officers had contacted Sirawit Serithiwat and told him that they would come to pick him up from Thammasat University, Rangsit Campus, and bring him to a military base for a discussion. The student leader declined the request and turned his communication devices off. Being unable to contact him, the military officers went to the home of his mother instead, and asked her to convince her son to call off the event planned for 7 December. They even threatened her that the family could not blame them for any 'consequences'. At approximately 7.30 am on 6 December, his mother was contacted by the military officers again, and was asked to meet with them in a military barracks that afternoon. She denied this request.

This case is the latest evidence that the country's military government is using arbitrary powers of detention to silence peaceful activism. Front Line Defenders believes that these actions highlight Thailand's need to remove the military's powers of arbitrary detention, which are being used to harass and criminalise peaceful dissent.

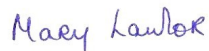
Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in Thailand to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally remove all restrictions on the free movement of Sirawit Serithiwat and the other activists and cease all further forms of harassment against them, as it is believed that these measures are solely related to their legitimate human rights activities;
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 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 5: *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully” (b) To form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups (c) To communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations”* and to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

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

Yours sincerely,



Mary Lawlor
Executive Director

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