

21 October 2020

Thailand: Attempted killing of land rights defender Dam Onmuang

On 20 October 2020, land rights defender **Dam Onmuang** survived an attempt on his life. The defender was at his house in Surat Thani province when an individual believed to be affiliated with a multinational palm oil company broke in and pointed a gun at him. The gunshot missed the defender and the perpetrator fled the scene.

Dam Onmuang is a land rights defender and member of the Southern Peasant Federation of Thailand (SPFT). The defender has been a strong advocate for community land and natural resources management for marginalised people in Thailand. He has played a vital role in his capacity as the community coordinator in the Santi Pattana community, by taking the lead in negotiating in land disputes with palm oil companies and the authorities, so as to protect and safeguard the community's guardianship of the land and natural resources.

On 20 October 2020, at 1:00am, an individual believed to be affiliated with a multinational palm oil company, entered the home of land rights defender Dam Onmuang and attempted to kill him. After the defender evaded the shot from the gun, the assailant escaped immediately and drove away. This attempt on Dam Onmuang's life is the latest in a series of attempted killings and death threats against land rights defenders associated with SPFT.

Later on the same day, the land rights defender, along with several members of his community travelled to the Bang Sawan Police Station, to file a complaint. Several hours later, the assailant surrendered at the same police station. The police previously attempted to persuade the defender to settle the case before registering his complaint.

Since early 2010, land rights defenders associated with SPFT have been the target of various forms of harassment, including killings, forcible eviction, arbitrary arrest and detention, and judicial harassment. Defenders and local groups believe that these attacks are perpetrated by individuals associated with the palm oil companies and other associated business interests. While several formal complaints have been registered, the perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity.

Front Line Defenders condemns the ongoing intimidation and death threats against land rights defender Dam Onmuang and members of SPFT, as it believes he and the group are being targeted for their legitimate and peaceful work for in defence of human rights, specifically on land rights, in Thailand.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Thailand to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attempted killing of Dam Onmuang, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Dam Onmuang;

3. 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.