

05 April 2019

Thailand: Ekachai Hongkangwan's car torched, Anurak Jeantawanich assaulted

On 1 April 2019, **Ekachai Hongkangwan's** car was set ablaze by unknown assailants. Hours before, on 31 March 2019, **Anurak Jeantawanich** was attacked by two men in his home. These attacks occurred after a rally co-organised by the human rights defenders on 31 March 2019 to collect signatures for a petition to dissolve the Election Commission.

Ekachai Hongkangwan is a writer and human rights defender. He has been actively campaigning for transparency and democracy in Thailand since 2016, and has been especially vocal in calling for elections to be held in the country. Since the general elections on 24 March 2019, the results of which are due to be confirmed on 9 May 2019, the human rights defender has been campaigning for greater transparency and fairness in the electoral process. He previously spent almost three years in prison under a lèse majesté conviction and has faced judicial harassment for speaking out against the undemocratic rule of the military junta.

Anurak Jeantawanich, also known as "Ford Red Path" for his involvement in the 'Red Shirt' pro-democracy movement, is a human rights defender who has been campaigning peacefully for more democratic space in Thailand since 2010. He has also been active in providing support to prisoners of conscience, especially those convicted of lèse majesté.

On 31 March 2019, Ekachai Hongkangwan and Anurak Jeantawanich organised a rally at the Ratchaprasong Intersection in Bangkok to collect signatures for a petition to dissolve the Election Commission. Their campaign started in response to irregularities in the preliminary results released by the Election Commission which gave rise to widespread public concern about the transparency and fairness of the electoral process. The rally attracted about 50 demonstrators and managed to collect 200-300 signatures as well as copies of identity cards.

After the demonstration, two men clad in black and wearing helmets attacked Anurak Jeantawanich in his home at around 9.45pm the same night. They arrived at the human rights defender's home on a motorcycle and barged in carrying wooden clubs that were approximately 60cm long. The assailants then began beating Anurak Jeantawanich with the clubs and only left when he managed to snatch one of the clubs from them. The human rights defender sustained injuries on his arms as a result of the attack. Immediately after, Anurak Jeantawanich called the national emergency hotline to report the incident. The following day, on 1 April 2019, he reported the case at the Samut Prakan Police Station.

Just hours after Anurak Jeantawanich was attacked, at around 1.15am on 1 April 2019, Ekachai Hongkangwan's car was set ablaze by a man wearing a helmet. CCTV footage of the incident shows the assailant kicking the side mirror of the car before pouring petrol on the windscreen and setting it on fire. The human rights defender's neighbours say that four other people were also involved in the arson attack.

After the rally, Ekachai Hongkangwan had parked his car in front of his home and had left documents from the rally, including 200-300 signed forms and copies of identification cards collected from supporters of the campaign, as well as a loud speaker, in the vehicle. All of this was destroyed along with the car. The human rights defender lodged a police report about the incident at the Lat Prao Police Station later the same day and police have since inspected the scene of the crime. The damaged car is currently being kept at the police station.

Prior to this, both human rights defenders had been intimidated and physically attacked multiple

times. The intensity and violence of these attacks and intimidation have recently increased and they remain at risk in the wake of current political developments in the country.

Ekachai Hongkangwan has been physically assaulted six times since January 2018 and an arson attempt was also made on his car on 26 January 2019. He has filed complaints about these incidents with the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and the Justice Ministry's Department of Rights and Liabilities Protection, but the perpetrators have yet to be brought to justice. Fearing for his safety, he has also submitted a request for protection to the army but no effective measures have been taken. Anurak Jeantawanich was detained and questioned by police in 2014 and 2016 respectively for protesting peacefully.

Front Line Defenders condemns the attacks against Ekachai Hongkangwan and Anurak Jeantawanich, which it believes to be a result of their peaceful and legitimate human rights work, specifically on democratisation in Thailand.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Thailand to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assaults against Ekachai Hongkangwan and Anurak Jeantawanich, 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 Ekachai Hongkangwan and Anurak Jeantawanich;
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.

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 attention 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*" and to Article 18 (2): "*Individuals, groups, and non-governmental organisations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes.*"

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

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director