

24 May 2018

Thailand: Fifteen human rights defenders arrested and charged for demanding free and fair elections

On 22 May 2018, fifteen pro-democracy human rights defenders, including **Anon Nampa**, **Rangsiman Rome**, **Sirawith Seritiwat**, **Chonticha Jaengrew** and **Piyarat Chongthep**, were arrested and charged with sedition, with violating the junta's ban on political gatherings of five people or more, and under the Road Traffic Act for participating in peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations in Bangkok.

[Anon Nampa](#) is a human rights lawyer who works with Thai Lawyers for Human Rights. He has defended numerous individuals accused of lèse-majesté under Article 112 of the Criminal Code, including the [jailed](#) human rights defender [Jatupat Boonpattaraksa](#). [Rangsiman Rome](#) is the leader of Democracy Restoration Group and has been arrested multiple times by the military police. [Sirawit Serithiwat](#) is a human rights defender and a student of Thammasat University. [Chonticha Jaengrew](#) is a human rights defender and a member of New Democracy Movement and Democracy Restoration Group, which have both been prominent in campaigning for human rights and democracy since the coup d'état in May 2014. [Piyarat Chongthep](#) is the head of For Friends Association, which provides assistance to political prisoners and dissidents.

All fifteen were arrested and charged for calling on the military junta to hold general elections. On 23 May, the police informed the lawyers of the human rights defenders that additional charges under the public assembly act will be pressed against the human rights defenders. On 24 May, the fifteen human rights defenders were released on bail on the condition they don't engage in illegal political activities. Their bail bonds were 100,000 Baht each (approximately EUR2670).

As part of a peaceful rally marking four years since the military coup, the human rights defenders had been demanding that the military junta step down and that general elections be held no later than November this year. The military government has repeatedly gone back on its promise to hold elections.

The march departed from Thammasat University and had intended to go as far as the Prime Minister's Office, but was prevented from doing so. At that point, the human rights defenders were arrested. Ten of them, including Anon Nampa and Chonticha Jaengrew, were arrested and brought to Phaya Thai Police Station, and five, including Rangsiman Rome, Sirawith Seritiwat and Piyarat Chongthep were brought to Chana Songkhram Police Station.

The human rights defenders have been charged with sedition under Section 116 of the Penal Code, which carries a maximum sentence of seven years; with participating in an unauthorised political gathering of five or more people under Article 12 of the National Council for Peace and Order's (NCPO) Order No. 3/2558 (NCPO Order 3/2015), which can carry either a prison sentence of up to six months, a fine not exceeding 10,000 Baht (approximately EUR266), or both; with breaching the peace as part of a group of ten or more people under Section 215 of the Penal Code, which carries a maximum sentence of

6 months; and with refusing to disperse under Section 216 of the Penal Code, for which they can be sentenced to a maximum of three years. They were also charged with violating the Road Traffic Act.

Since the 2014 coup d'état, the NCPO has maintained its grip on the country through a series of restrictive laws. The junta's intolerance for dissenting voices has resulted in a challenging climate for human rights defenders and judicial harassment, one of the most common tools to silence human rights defenders in Thailand, has intensified.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest of the fifteen human rights defenders in Bangkok as it strongly believes that it is directly linked to their peaceful and legitimate work as pro-democracy human rights defenders in Thailand.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Thailand to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against the human rights defenders as it is believed that the charges are solely a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defense of human rights;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release the human rights defenders;
3. Review existing legislation with a view to lifting undue restrictions on freedom of assembly;
4. Guarantee that 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.