

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/226/2008
02 September 2008

Thailand: State of Emergency should not infringe on human rights

The Thai government should remove restrictions on free speech contained in today's emergency decree, Amnesty International said.

"The government is ultimately responsible for the security of all Thai citizens, regardless of their political views," said Benjamin Zawacki, Amnesty International's researcher on Thailand. "But the government should not use this state of emergency to silence free speech or infringe on other human rights."

"International law is clear that even under a state of emergency people have the right to voice their opinions on all issues affecting them - including on the emergency decree itself - and to articulate viewpoints that differ from those of the government or groups they oppose".

In addition, the government should limit the decree's current restriction on freedom to assembly to only the areas in Bangkok most affected by the ongoing protests and stand-off among the various political groups.

"These demonstrations and counter-demonstrations show that many Thai people are frustrated with the lack of respect for the rule of law and the lack of accountability. So what is ultimately needed is greater accountability, upholding the rule of law, and more respect for civil and political rights," Zawacki said.

Violent clashes between pro-government demonstrators and the anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) outside Bangkok's Government House left one person dead and more than 40 injured, triggering the declaration of a state of emergency earlier today.

Amnesty International urges all political leaders, including those of the PAD, to respect human rights.

Background

PAD members occupied the state-run National Broadcasting Services of Thailand (NBT) television station on 26 August and thousands continue to occupy Government House, which includes the prime minister's office, since that day. Incidents of violence occurred on 29 August at both Government House and the Metropolitan Police Headquarters, and an explosion occurred outside a police guardhouse on 1 September. Dozens of protesters and police have been injured, and nearly 100 protesters detained.

Section 9(3) of Thailand's Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situation (2005) prohibits press releases, the distribution or dissemination of letters, publications or any other means of communication containing texts which may instigate fear amongst the people, or is intended to distort information or create understandings of the emergency situation to the extent of affecting the security of state or public order or good morals of the people of the entire Kingdom.

The Thai government has not invoked all provisions of the emergency decree refraining from, among other orders, imposing a curfew on Bangkok. It has also indicated that it would remain in force only as long as necessary.