

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/ possible "disappearance"/ death threats

18 March 2004

THAILAND

Somchai Neelapaijit (m), aged 52- human rights lawyer

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Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of Somchai Neelapaijit, a Muslim human rights lawyer who has not been seen since 12 March. It is feared that he may have been abducted by members of the security forces. Concern is heightened by his colleagues' reports that he had received anonymous death threats prior to his disappearance and by a recent Thai Human Rights Commission report that some of his Muslim clients have been severely tortured in police custody.

Somchai Neelapaijit is the Vice Chair of the Law Society of Thailand's Human Rights Committee and the Chairman of the Muslim Lawyers Association. Since receiving death threats, he had been regularly informing his colleagues and family of his whereabouts. He has not however, appeared at any of his appointments since his disappearance, nor has his family heard from him. Whilst Amnesty International welcomes the government's announcement that it is conducting an investigation into his disappearance, it calls for an increase in efforts to locate him.

Somchai Neelapaijit was providing legal assistance to nine Muslims accused of involvement in the violence against security forces in southern Thailand, which has resulted in the deaths of 50 people since the beginning of 2004. He has also led public efforts for the end of martial law in southern Thailand, which the government imposed in the wake of recent violent attacks against the security forces. Prior to his "disappearance", Somchai Neelapaijit had also been providing legal assistance to Muslims who were arrested for alleged involvement in *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), an Islamist group in Southeast Asia advocating violence.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the last three years human rights defenders in Thailand have faced increasing threats, intimidation, and harassment, particularly if they are members of minority groups. The recent disappearance of Somchai Neelapaijit has increased a climate of fear among human rights lawyers, community leaders and other human rights defenders. The print and broadcast media have also recently come under increasing pressure from the government not to publish articles critical of their policies.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:**

- expressing grave concern for the safety of Somchai Neelapaijit, who "disappeared" on 12 March;
- urging the authorities to make every effort to clarify and make public his whereabouts;
- calling for immediate protection for his family members and colleagues;
- urging the authorities to investigate anonymous death threats made against him
- calling on the authorities to ensure that all members of the security forces are made aware of the legitimate role of human rights defenders and their responsibility to protect them under the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally-recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra,  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Government House, Pitsanulok Road, Dusit  
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Faxes:** + 66 2 629 8213  
**Salutation:** Dear Prime Minister

Police General Sant Sarutanond,  
Chief of Police  
Rama 1, Patumwan,  
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

**Telegrams:** Chief of Police, Bangkok, Thailand  
**Faxes:** + 66 2 255 1979  
**Salutation:** Dear General

General Chaovalit Yongchaiyudh,  
Deputy Prime Minister in Charge of Security  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Government House, Pitsanulok Road, Dusit  
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

**Telegrams:** Deputy Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand  
**Faxes:** + 66 2 280 1589  
**Salutation:** Dear Deputy Prime Minister

**COPIES TO:** Diplomatic representatives of Thailand accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 April 2004.