

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Prosecute Officers Responsible for Police Station Killing

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(Bangkok) A [video clip](#), posted on Facebook on August 24, 2021, appears to show police officers in [Thailand](#) torturing and killing a drug suspect, Human Rights Watch said today. The Thai authorities should fully and fairly prosecute the police officers responsible.

Media reported that, on August 5, the police physically assaulted Jeerapong Thanapat, a 24-year-old drug suspect, during an interrogation in an attempt to force him to reveal hidden methamphetamines and to pay a two million baht (US\$61,000) bribe for his release. The video appears to show the superintendent of the Muang Nakhon Sawan province police station and other police officers suffocating Thanapat with plastic bags until he collapses and stops breathing. The police reportedly ordered doctors at Sawan Pracharak Hospital to write in a medical report that the cause of Jeerapongs death was methamphetamine overdose.

A prosecution fully independent of the Thai police is needed if there is any hope of justice in the torture and killing of Jeerapong Thanapat, said [Brad Adams](#), the Asia Director at Human Rights Watch. Successive Thai governments have a long history of failing to ensure accountability for even the most ghastly police abuses against people in custody.

On August 25, the Nakhon Sawan court approved an arrest warrant for the Muang Nakhon Sawan police superintendent, Col. Thitisan Utthanaphon, and six other police officers identified in the video clip. They are Maj. Raveeroj Dittthong, Capt. Songyot Khlainak, Lt. Thoranin Makwanna, Sen. Sgt. Maj. Wisut Bunkhiew, Sen. Sgt. Maj. Supakorn Nimchuen, and L/C. Paweekorn Khammarieo.

They are charged with malfeasance causing damage to another person, colluding with five people or more in the coercion of another person, and collusion in killing another person by torture. Thitisan and Thoranin remain at large, while the five others have been arrested.

The torture and killing of a drug suspect in Nakhon Sawan province is not an isolated incident by rogue police officers, Human Rights Watch said. Beginning in 2003 under then-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Thai police carried out a notorious [war on drugs](#) that resulted in the deaths of at least 2,819 suspected drug traffickers, many of which appeared to be extrajudicial killings.

Virtually none of the police commanders and officers responsible for the war on drugs killings and related abuses have been brought to justice. Harsh measures against alleged drug traffickers remain politically popular, and police brutality has been tolerated in Thailand's anti-drug campaign. The courts and other agencies, including Thailand's National Human Rights Commission, have proven ineffectual in addressing police misconduct.

Thailand is a party to the United Nations [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), which obligates governments to investigate and prosecute acts of torture and other ill-treatment. Article 4 of the Convention states that a government should ensure that all acts of torture are offences under its criminal law. The same shall apply to an attempt to commit torture and to an act by any person which constitutes complicity or participation in torture. The government should also make these offences punishable by appropriate penalties, which take into account their grave nature.

The Thai government should promptly act to fulfill past pledges to make torture a criminal offense in national law, Human Rights Watch said.

The evident role of the police in yet another drug suspect killing should be a wake-up call for the Thai government to establish institutions that can independently investigate and prosecute police officers for wrongdoing, Adams said.

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