

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Thailand: Somyot Phrueksakasemsuk must be released on bail

Paris-Geneva, January 23, 2015 - Thailand's Supreme Court must immediately release on bail human rights defender Somyot Phrueksakasemsuk, as a first step towards his unconditional release, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, an FIDH-OMCT joint programme, said today.

The Observatory made the call on the third anniversary of the Bangkok Criminal Court's conviction of Somyot on charges of lèse-majesté (Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code), on January 23, 2012. Somyot is the Editor of the magazine "Voice of Thaksin" (Voice of the Oppressed) and a free speech advocate who called for the amendment of Thailand's lèse-majesté laws.

"The Thai judiciary's determination to keep Somyot behind bars pending trial as if he were a dangerous criminal is absurd," said FIDH President Karim Lahidji. ***"The Supreme Court must immediately order his release on bail under reasonable and appropriate conditions and expedite the appeal process."***

On November 19, 2014, Somyot filed an appeal to the Supreme Court against his conviction. Somyot remains incarcerated in Bangkok Remand Prison pending his appeal. He has been detained since his arrest on April 30, 2011. Somyot suffers from gout and hypertension and is not receiving adequate medical treatment at Bangkok Remand Prison. Court officials have denied Somyot's requests for bail 16 times - the last time on November 18.

On September 19, 2014, the Court of Appeals upheld the Bangkok Criminal Court's lèse-majesté conviction of Mr. Somyot Phrueksakasemsuk. The court failed to inform Somyot, his lawyer, and his family members that the hearing would take place on that day.

"Somyot's ongoing deprivation of liberty is in violation of Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Thailand is a State party, which elucidates the principle that release pending trial must be the rule and detention the exception," said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

Eleven people, including Somyot, are currently serving prison terms after being found guilty of violating Article 112 of the Criminal Code. In addition, at least another 16 remain detained on lèse-majesté charges.

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