



- **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

Thailand: Reprisals against human rights defenders have no place in a peaceful society

Geneva 30 September 2016. The Thai Government's decision to stop the public launch of an Amnesty International report on the use of torture and other ill-treatment sends out an alarming message: those who report or document allegations of torture risk serious reprisals from the State.

While the Thai Government has taken positive steps in drafting a law to criminalise torture, as well as in preparing to join the torture prevention system under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), this incident is not a step in that direction. The expressed intention to ratify OPCAT means that Thailand is prepared to ensure that all places where persons are deprived of their liberty in the country are open to independent oversight. These efforts will likely be much less effective in changing bad practices and behaviour of staff if the relevant authorities are not equally committed to investigate allegations of torture where they are reported, and to bring perpetrators to justice.

The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) has an ongoing engagement with the Ministry of Justice in Thailand and human rights defenders to support the process towards ratification of the OPCAT. In 2013 we hosted our first Asia Pacific Fellow, Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, director of the Cross Cultural Foundation. As a major partner in Thailand, Ms Khongkachonkiet and her organisation have assisted the APT in advocacy for torture prevention and in our contributions to the criminalisation of torture in the country. In January 2016, Ms Khongkachonkiet and other activists presented a thorough report documenting torture and ill-treatment in the Southern Border Provinces. The Thai Army responded – not by investigating the allegations, but by filing a complaint against the authors for “criminal defamation”. **We are appalled by the reprisals against these leading human rights defenders and urge that the legal action against Ms Pornpen Khongkachonkiet and her colleagues be withdrawn.**

Torture and ill-treatment have no place in a progressive and peaceful society. The expressed interest and commitment by Thailand to implement the UN Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol, demonstrates a national acknowledgement

that torture and ill-treatment is an abhorrent practice. But such pledges have no true meaning if they are not translated into policies and practices that create an environment where torture is absolutely prohibited. Reprisals against those who report or document allegations of torture will undeniably lessen public confidence in the Government's commitment to respect human rights.

The APT would like to reiterate that a government's political will to bring perpetrators of torture and ill-treatment to justice is at the core of all efforts to prohibit and prevent torture. This can only be effectively done if States are ready to support and protect the small voices that are bringing to light such abuses.

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