



- **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

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## Welcome decision to drop charges against human rights defenders in Thailand

Geneva 9 March 2017. The Association for the Prevention of Torture welcomes the decision by the Thai Military on Tuesday 7 March to drop criminal charges for defamation against three human rights defenders, Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, Somchai Homlaor and Anchana Heemmina. They had faced reprisals for documenting allegations of torture by security forces in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces.

In a statement, the Military's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) asserted the need for authorities and civil society in Thailand to work together to address human rights violations. This includes setting an independent body to investigate torture allegations documented in the report and a mechanism for civil society and government cooperation to prevent human rights abuses in Southern Thailand.

This is a promising step towards stronger respect and cooperation between the authorities and human rights defenders in Thailand, particularly in efforts to prevent torture and ill-treatment. We hope that this decision will lead to actions by the authorities to protect other human rights defenders in Thailand and ensure that they will not be subjected to reprisals in the future.

We support the proposal to set up a committee to investigate the 54 allegations of torture and ill-treatment. To be effective, such a committee needs to be independent, constructive, ensure mutual respect and adhere to human rights principles. Perpetrators must also be held accountable in a court of justice.

We also welcome the possibility that through the joint mechanism, the Thai government may review and re-launch their efforts to criminalize torture in Thailand. This will provide an opportunity for the Government to prove their commitment to sustain its efforts to prevent torture in the country.

The joint mechanism is expected to examine future reports of torture allegations and that their views and findings will be included in their report. We hope that the suggested process will be constructive and ensure civil society's fullest participation

and contribution. Furthermore, we trust that the authorities will seize this chance to build a sincere partnership with human rights defenders and restore their confidence in the State's commitment to combat impunity and uphold human rights in Thailand.

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