

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Thailand: Acquittal of two reporters a positive step for media freedom

Paris-Geneva-Bangkok, September 1, 2015 - The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders urges Thailand to repeal its criminal defamation laws following the acquittal of two reporters.

Today, the Phuket Provincial Court acquitted Ms. **Chutima “Oi” Sidasathian** and Mr. **Alan Morison**, two journalists with the *Phuket Wan* news website, on computer crimes under Article 14(1) of the 2007 Computer Crimes Act and libel under Articles 326 and 328 of the Thai Criminal Code.

“The acquittal of Chutima and Alan is a positive step for media freedom and freedom of speech in Thailand. Thailand must now abolish criminal defamation and make the Computer Crimes Act compliant with the country’s international law obligations,” said FIDH President Karim Lahidji.

The criminal proceedings against the Thai journalist and her Australian colleague stemmed from a post on the *Phuket Wan* website on July 17, 2013, that quoted parts of a special report published by the international news agency *Reuters* on the same day. In its report, *Reuters* alleged that Thai naval forces were involved in the trafficking of Rohingya boat people in Southern Thailand.

“We welcome the acquittal of Chutima and Alan. Nonetheless, their judicial harassment is a reminder of the ongoing media repression in a country that not too long ago was considered a beacon of media freedom in Southeast Asia. Thai authorities must immediately end all forms of harassment of media workers and human rights defenders and guarantee their right to freedom of expression,” said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

In recent years, Thailand has witnessed several high-profile cases involving charges under its criminal defamation laws and the Computer Crimes Act to silence media workers and human rights defenders.

On 24 August 2015, the Bangkok South Criminal Court indicted migrant and worker rights defender Mr. **Andy Hall** under Article 14(1) of the Computer Crimes Act and Article 328 of the Thai Criminal Code (libel). Natural Fruit, a Thai pineapple processing company, filed the case as a result of Hall’s research for a 2013 report published by the Finnish NGO Finnwatch. The report documented labour rights abuses of migrant workers from Burma at the company’s factory in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province. Hall faces a maximum penalty of seven years in prison if convicted.

On 30 May 2012, the Bangkok Criminal Court sentenced Ms. Chiranuch “Jiew” Premchaiporn, Executive Director of the online news website *Prachatai*, to one year in prison and a 30,000 baht (750 Euros) fine under Article 15 of the Computer Crimes Act. The court reduced the sentence to an eight-month suspended jail term and a 20,000 baht fine. The charges were the result of Chiranuch’s failure to promptly remove comments that had been posted on the *Prachatai* web board between April and November 2008, which the court considered to have offended the monarchy.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this



programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders.

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