

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Thailand: Free Somyot, expedite his appeal trial

Paris-Geneva, April 30, 2015 - Thailand's Supreme Court must immediately release on bail human rights defender Somyot Phrueksakasemsuk and expedite his appeal trial, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, an FIDH-OMCT joint programme, said today.

The Observatory reiterated its call on the fourth anniversary of Somyot's detention on lèse-majesté charges (Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code). Article 112 imposes jail terms ranging from three to 15 years for persons found guilty of defaming, insulting, or threatening the King, the Queen, the Heir to the throne, or the Regent.

"The protracted arbitrary detention of Somyot exudes a profound lack of fairness that is a typical characteristic of lèse-majesté prosecutions. The Supreme Court must reverse this trend by ordering Somyot's immediate release on bail and expediting his appeal trial", said FIDH President Karim Lahidji.

Somyot, 53, is Thailand's fourth longest serving lèse-majesté detainee. A former labor activist and editor of the now-defunct magazine *Voice of Taksin*, Somyot was arrested on April 30, 2011 - five days after he launched a petition campaign to collect 10,000 signatures required for a parliamentary review of Article 112. On January 23, 2013, the Bangkok Criminal Court sentenced Somyot to 10 years in prison on two counts of lèse-majesté. Somyot was convicted for allowing the publication of two satirical articles in the *Voice of Taksin* that were written by someone else and deemed to have insulted the monarchy.

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

On November 19, 2014, Somyot filed an appeal to the Supreme Court against his conviction. He remains incarcerated in Bangkok Remand Prison pending his appeal. Court officials have denied Somyot's requests for bail 16 times - the last time on November 18, 2014.

"Thailand must put an immediate end to the deplorable judicial harassment of Somyot. The continued denial of his right to bail - a right that Thai courts frequently grant to individuals accused of serious crimes - contravenes Thailand's obligations under international law and reflects the unfair treatment reserved to lèse-majesté detainees", said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

In an opinion issued on August 30, 2012, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) ruled that Somyot's detention was arbitrary. The UNWGAD called on the authorities to release Somyot and award him compensation.

Nineteen individuals, 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 awaiting trial on lèse-majesté charges.

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