



Thailand: Ensure accountability for Thailand's 2010 political massacre

(Jakarta, 19 May 2020) – A decade after Thailand's deadly crackdown against anti-government protesters, accountability for the political massacre remains elusive, said rights organisations on its tenth anniversary.

In a joint statement today, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and the Asia Democracy Network (ADN) call on the Government of Thailand to re-activate its investigation into the crackdown, and ensure transparent proceedings and due process for all involved.

'The Government must ensure that activists fighting for justice for victims of this massacre are protected from reprisals. The Government should take genuine and impartial steps towards ensuring justice for all if it is to gain the trust of its people,' the groups urged.

On 12 March 2010, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), also known as the Red Shirts, launched an anti-government march calling for the dissolution of Parliament and the holding of new elections. They were protesting against political turmoil in the country exacerbated by a biased and prejudiced political system. The demonstration intensified and spread to Bangkok's business districts.

On 10 April 2010, the Royal Thai army fired 'live' ammunition against protesters to reclaim UDD areas, where protestors had set up camp, claiming its first casualties. The Government used the heavily armed 'Black Shirt' militants, who were responsible for deadly attacks on the army, as justification to intensify its 'live fire zones' around protesters.

By 19 May 2010, the excessive use of force, including the use of snipers and assault rifles, had resulted in more than 90 deaths and thousands of injuries. The casualties comprised mostly of unarmed civilian protesters, bystanders, volunteer medics, media reporters and state officials.

Post-mortem inquests of 33 individuals concluded that at least 18 were killed by bullets fired by the army. These included Kamolkate Akhad, a volunteer medic who was among six victims killed in Pathum Wanaram temple, despite it having been declared a 'safe zone'. Akhad was shot inside the medic tent despite wearing a Red Cross uniform.

On 4 May 2019, Phayao Akhad, the mother of victim Kamolkate Akhad, was informed that the charges against eight military officers accused of killing her daughter were withdrawn due to the lack of evidence.¹

Efforts to hold state perpetrators accountable within the past decade have not led to any results. The Supreme Court in 2017 dismissed the cases against two top government officials responsible for the crackdown, citing a lack of jurisdiction. The Thai authorities have yet to issue post-mortem examinations for the more than 50 deaths in the massacre.

Advocates for victims from the crackdown face repercussion for demanding justice. Phayao Akhad has faced threats for speaking up and calling for justice on her daughter's death.

¹ <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2019/05/04/army-drops-charges-against-soldiers-who-kill-6-in-temple/>

On 10 May 2020, a group of people were threatened with legal repercussions after they used laser projectors to display the message 'Searching for Truth' on to the walls of downtown buildings connected to the 2010 crackdown in Bangkok. Three days later, prominent Red Shirt activist Anurak Jeantawanich (aka Ford Anurak), was arrested after an event commemorating the 2010 crackdown. Police accused him of holding a gathering which violated the social distancing policies under the Emergency Decree. He was later released on bail.²

Ten years on, none of the operating soldiers, commanding officers or government officials who authorised the lethal military operations have been convicted of criminal charges. The massacre and the impunity with which it was allowed to happen, continues to mar the country's image and creates a legacy of fear.

The rights groups are calling on the Government of Thailand to carry out a reliable and transparent investigation to assure its people that such forms of violence would never recur, and to ensure the protection of advocates pushing for accountability.

Those criminally responsible need to be held accountable, regardless of position or political affiliation. Without this accountability, the right to fundamental freedoms, and the ability of the public to trust its Government remains compromised.

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. www.forum-asia.org

The Asian Democracy Network (ADN) works to promote and advance democratisation and democratic governance at all levels of society through effective solidarity and cooperation among civil society organisations and democracy advocates in Asia. ADN is committed to building a just, equitable and sustainable community of democratic societies in Asia, where all human rights of all individuals, groups and peoples are fully respected and realised. www.adnasia.org

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² <https://prachatai.com/journal/2020/05/87642>