



Thailand: Protect fundamental freedoms in the upcoming protests

(Jakarta, 18 September 2020) – International human rights organisations are calling on the Government of Thailand to observe international human rights laws and standards ahead of a planned protest expected to attract tens of thousands to Bangkok this weekend.

‘We urge the Thai government to observe its commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to facilitate a peaceful assembly and to take all steps necessary to ensure the protection of all participants. Any restriction that the Government imposes must fall under permissible restrictions as defined by international human rights standards,’ the rights groups said.

The statement was jointly issued by the Asia Democracy Network (ADN), the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) and the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS).

Having ratified the ICCPR in 1996, Thailand is duty bound to protect the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Article 21 of the ICCPR reads: The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognised. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The date of the rally, 19 September, coincides with the anniversary of the 2006 military coup which toppled Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s government. The intended location, Thammasat University, also holds significance as it has a long history linked to Thai civil society’s struggle for democracy.

‘The Government’s obligation to respect and protect fundamental freedoms extends beyond ensuring these protests are held safely and free from unwarranted interference. Civil society should be free to gather and express their views, free from reprisals by the Government,’ they said.

This weekend’s mass protest follows months of mostly student-led peaceful demonstrations that have erupted across the country, where Thailand’s youth have aired grievances and called for change. Repressive laws limiting the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association remain in place. For many activists, the post-elections period has only been a continuation of the junta, with the same authoritarian leaders and systems in power.

Additional quotes:

Asia Democracy Network (ADN)

'The struggle of the Thais to demand reforms and expansion of civic space serves as a beacon of hope for all those working to defend democracy in Asia. We urge the Thai government to fulfill its human rights obligations and engage the protesters constructively.' said the Asia Democracy Network.

Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu, Executive Director, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

'Students, activists and civil society have the right to express their views, individually and as a collective, and the Government should enable safe spaces for people to discuss issues of concern.'

Charles Santiago, Chairperson, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) and Malaysian Member of Parliament

'Peacefully voicing your opinion in public is not a crime. Those participating in peaceful protests should not do so at the cost of their liberty. The Thai authorities should know by now that their repeated attempts at silencing calls for greater democracy are not only illegal but also counterproductive. Thai youth in particular are hungry for change, and the authorities' threats will merely strengthen their determination. Instead, Thai leaders might find that listening to those willing to peacefully discuss Thailand's future will in fact be of greater benefit to the country.'

David Kode, Advocacy and Campaigns Lead, World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS)

'Peaceful protest is a legitimate form of dissent. Instead of disrupting the protest or harassing organisers as we have seen in the past, we urge the Thai authorities to listen to the grievances of the protesters and take meaningful steps to address them.'

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Boilerplates

The Asia 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

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. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) is a regional network of current and former parliamentarians who use their unique positions to advance human rights and democracy in Southeast Asia. APHR seeks to help create a region where people can express themselves without fear, live free

from all forms of discrimination and violence, and where development takes place with human rights at the forefront. www.aseanmp.org

The World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php>

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