



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

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COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE - COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

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IMMEDIATE

Thailand: Disappearance of Human Rights Lawyer

An urgent and thorough investigation into the disappearance of prominent human rights lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit must be carried out, said the Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ/CIJL).

Mr. Somchai, Chairman of Thailand's Muslim Lawyers Association and Vice-Chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Law Society of Thailand, disappeared on 12 March in Bangkok. He was reportedly taken from his car, which was found abandoned and dented. He had been scheduled to fly to Narathiwat and had not cancelled his flight.

"We urge the Thai Government to carry out a serious investigation into Mr. Somchai's disappearance and, in the event that it is determined that he was abducted, to prosecute those responsible", said Linda Besharaty-Movaed, ICJ/CIJL Legal Advisor. "The Government must take all necessary steps to ensure Mr. Somchai's safety to carry out his work".

A prominent human rights lawyer and activist, Mr. Somchai is currently representing five Muslims accused of participating in the 4 January raid in which four soldiers were killed and four suspected Thai members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a violent Islamist group accused of plotting bomb attacks in Thailand and other countries. The 4 January raid marked the start of an upsurge of violence in southern Thailand that has left at least 50 people dead.

Mr. Somchai reportedly told colleagues and family members that he had received threats since he took on the cases of the alleged members of JI and he started denouncing police torture of some suspects. In the most recent threat, he was reportedly told that his name had been included by security forces on the list of members of terrorist groups. The Government attributed Mr. Somchai's disappearance to a marital feud. However, Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit later said he had received unconfirmed reports that four "strangely dressed men", who could have passed for officials, were with Mr. Somchai at a hotel where he was last seen.

The ICJ/CIJL urges the Thai Government to ensure that the UN Principles on the Role of Lawyers are respected, specifically principle 17 which states that, "Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities".

For more information, please contact José Zeitune, Lawyer, at +41 22 979 3812. End.

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81A, avenue de Châtelaine, P.O. Box 216, 1219 Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41(0) 22 979 3800 – Fax: +41(0) 22 979 3801 – Website: <http://www.icj.org> – E-mail: info@icj.org

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