



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

Commission internationale de juristes - Comisión Internacional de Juristas

" dedicated since 1952 to the primacy, coherence and implementation of international law and principles that advance human rights "

COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE - COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

For immediate release

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Thailand: ICJ marks the three-year anniversary of the disappearance of prominent Muslim lawyer

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today expressed its condolences to the relatives of lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit who was forcibly disappeared on 12 March 2004, and urged the Interim Government to ensure meaningful progress in the investigation of this crime and to bring those responsible to justice.

It is three years to the day that Somchai Neelapaijit was forcibly disappeared, but the investigation into the circumstances of his enforced disappearance remains incomplete and the whereabouts of his body are still unknown.

On 12 January 2006, the Criminal Court convicted a senior police officer of charges relating to the enforced disappearance. However, the conviction only related to coercion and assault, and not the enforced disappearance itself. ICJ Commissioner, Justice Elizabeth Evatt, who observed the trial, considered that the evidence indicated that a more serious crime had been committed. The police officer concerned was sentenced to three years imprisonment. He was released on bail pending his appeal. One year later his appeal has still not been heard.

The ICJ expressed its deep concern that after three years those responsible are still to be brought to justice.

The ICJ was encouraged by pledges the Minister for Justice made in late 2006 that he would oversee the investigation by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI). More recently, the DSI reported that it now has enough evidence to indicate that Somchai Neelapaijit is dead, but it has not been able to locate his body. "The Interim Government should ensure that the DSI has the necessary resources and support to act promptly, impartially and without further delay to identify the perpetrators", said the ICJ.

The ICJ welcomed the assurances given last month by the Thai Prime Minister, General Surayud Chulanont, in a meeting with the ICJ Secretary-General, Nicholas Howen, that the Interim Government considered it important to ensure justice for past human rights violations, including that of Somchai Neelapaijit.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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Background

Somchai Neelapaijit has been missing since 12 March 2004, when he was last seen in Bangkok getting into a car with a group of men. At the time of his enforced disappearance, he was the Chairman of Thailand's Muslim Lawyers Association and Vice-Chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Law Society of Thailand. He was representing five Muslims accused of terrorism-related activities in the southern provinces and had accused law enforcement officials of torturing his clients whilst in detention.

For further information, please contact the ICJ at +41 (0) 22 979 3800.