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Press Statement

Rights Organizations Condemn Assault against Assoc. Prof. Worajet, core leader of Nitirat Group Tolerance urged to embrace differing opinions State obliged to prevent social terror and promptly bring perpetrators to justice

Assoc. Prof. Worajet Pakirat, lecturer of the Faculty of Law, Thammasat University and a member of the Nitirat Group, was assaulted by two men in the Tha Pra Chan Campus of Thammasat University on the afternoon of 29th February 2012. The incidence took place in the Faculty's parking lot.

The undersigned organizations feel gravely concerned that the reason behind the attack could stem from the lecturer's taking the lead as a core member of the Nitirat Group. There is no reason to believe that the attack could have been resulted from personal grudges. Previously, the Nitirat Group has proposed recommendations based on academic evidence to void the remnant of the 19th September 2006 coup and reform of the lèse majesté law or Section 112 of the Penal Code. A campaign has been spearheaded by the group in the name of the Campaign Committee for the Amendment of Section 112 to collect 10,000 signatures to propose an Amendment Bill to the Parliament. As a result of that, members of the Nitirat Group who are university lecturers have been subjected to controversies. Some criticisms made against the group are within the legal boundary and fall within democratic norm and international human rights standards, but others seem to have transgressed acceptable norms and have gone as far as insulting, defaming and threatening to commit bodily harm, which is an unlawful act and a breach of the rights and freedom. Previously, effigies of Dr. Worajet have been burned, i.e., on 27 January 2012, at the gate of Thammasat University. And now, Dr. Worajet has to suffer physical assault.

We deem that the incidence will spur a climate of fear in society. It might intimidate people who want to exercise their right to freedom of expression as provided for by the Constitution as they may fear that by doing so, they will get physical or even fatal retaliation from those who disagree with them. The campaign led by the Nitirat Group and the Campaign Committee for the Amendment of Section 112 have been conducted based on solid academic foundation and the right to freedom of expression which is so fundamental in democracy. It could be said that the group of lecturers are forefront human rights defenders and the state is obliged to uphold and protect their constitutional rights and freedom.

We deem that the attack was a breach of the right in body and showed a lack of respect for other people's rights and liberties. It reflected a lack of tolerance to listen to differing opinions, the behavior which undermines democratic value in the society. The attack is not simply a personal matter, but it is a matter of public safety and the right to freedom of expression which is a fundamental right. Therefore;

1. We condemn the violent retaliation and demand that the government promptly bring the perpetrators to justice. It would then show that the government is capable of upholding the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by the Constitution and helps to quell the climate of fear.
2. We demand that Thai people should hold on to their tolerance to listen to opinions different from theirs. Though the opinions expressed by the Nitirat Group and the Campaign Committee for the Amendment of Section 112 may not please certain groups of Thai people, but their campaigns have been conducted as prescribed for by the Constitution and are an exercise of the fundamental constitutional right.

With respect for people's rights and liberties
Human Rights Lawyers Association (HRLA)
Union for Civil Liberty (UCL)
Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF)
Campaign Committee for Human Rights (CCHR)
Environmental Litigation for the Wants (Enlaw)
Cross-Cultural Foundation (CrCF)
Center for Protection and Recovery of Local Community Rights (CPRLCR)
Community Resources Center (CRC)

For more information, please contact;

Mr. Panom Butakeaw (Thai Only) Coordinator, HRLA, Phone +662-6930682

Ms. Yada Hatthathammanoon (Thai/English)