

# Thailand after the coup: Public stages its first protest

Saturday 23 September 2006, by [PENNAPA Hongthong](#), [ROJANAPHRUK Pravit](#), [SUBHATRA Bhumiprabhas](#) (Date first published: 23 September 2006).

Nearly 100 people staged the first civilian protest against the coup last night, calling it illegitimate and a violation of Thai democracy.

The protesters in front of Bangkok's Siam Centre included university students, lecturers and social activists. All wore black to mourn the death of democracy and condemned the coup as counter-productive.

The demonstrators urged the public to resist the new military regime and vowed to continue their fight until democracy was restored. They called on people who opposed the coup to wear black or carry black banners.

"We believe that a military coup is not the answer," said Giles Ungphakorn, a well-known political scientist at Chulalongkorn University.

He said the 1997 Constitution should be restored along with press freedom and freedom of assembly.

Giles said the coup had annihilated the rights and liberty of Thais. When asked if he was speaking for the majority of Thais, he said: "We believe we speak for a significant number of Thais who are too worried or too afraid to speak."

Protesters held small banners which read "No to Thaksin. No to coup", "Don't call it reform - it's a coup" and "No to martial law". One small poster depicted the Democracy Monument with a text in English reading "On vacation again".

Nonetheless, all protesters denied backing ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

The protest attracted several bystanders and around 100 Thai and foreign journalists. Nobody was arrested.

Colonel Manit Wongsomboon, deputy commander of Metropolitan Police Division 6, said police had recorded the protest on video and would examine the tape to see if protesters had broken martial law forbidding an assembly of more than five people for political purposes.

Meanwhile, a website has been set up to collect signatures demanding that the Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy (CDRM) should not arrest or harm protesters who planned to express their disagreement with the coup.

The online petition, [www.petitiononline.com/thaicoup/petition.html](http://www.petitiononline.com/thaicoup/petition.html), was the initiative of Thongchai Winichakul, a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States. He declared that all the signatories regretted the September 19 coup and hoped that democracy would be restored as soon as possible.

The petition also urged the CDRM to respect freedom of expression, a basic human right, by allowing those who disagreed with the coup to express their opinions in the media, on websites and at public gatherings.

More than 400 people from various countries have signed the petition.

In England, a group of postgraduate Thai students at Oxford University called the Oxford Initiative said it planned to issue a statement to express disagreement with the coup. It hopes the CDRM will return civilian rule to Thailand as soon as possible.

However, the statement does not necessarily reflect the opinion of all Thai students at Oxford, said one of the group leaders.

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\* Circulated on the Asia Social Movements mailing list. From "The Nation",  
[http://nationmultimedia.com/2006/09/23/headlines/headlines\\_30014455.php](http://nationmultimedia.com/2006/09/23/headlines/headlines_30014455.php)