

# **Interim Status update on Human Rights situation in Thailand - Succession saga, Hyper-Royalism, deteriorating economy**

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We are now into the third year since the coup d'état on May 22, 2014 and during this time the Human Rights situation in Thailand has continued to deteriorate. The new junta orchestrated constitution will side-line democracy and entrench authoritarian control by the military regime's own appointed institutional bodies. It is not just Human Rights which the ruling junta government have destroyed, the economy, especially the rural economy, is also being destroyed. Corruption, on an unprecedented scale, is going unreported as there is no oversight on any of the activities of this ruling regime.

Following are some recent important points concerning the situation in Thailand worth highlighting

## **1. Succession saga**

A primary objective of the coup d'état on May 22, 2014 by the military was to control the Royal succession. The structures and personnel put in place during this succession will likely influence the governance of Thailand for decades to come. There is a marriage of convenience between the military regime and Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn (CP) as they will support his succession and then they will govern in his name for an extended period, under the pretext of stabilising the country, a return to democracy will be delayed to 2018 or later. The new king will not have the aura of his predecessor so the military regime will clamp down even further to ensure that no negative views are expressed on his reign and we can expect a further deterioration in human rights.

The succession itself was supposed to be a smooth process with the King's chosen successor, the CP, assuming the throne on his death, but there has been a delay. General Prem Tinsulanonda (another former dictator) is now Regent pro tempore and there are conflicting statements on when the CP will become King. The delay in declaring a new monarch is an additional factor generating more instability in the current climate. The reasons for the delay are not clear but may involve negotiations between rival royalist and military factions. If these negotiations are not resolved via dialogue then there could be a splintering of military alliances which could potentially lead to violence.

## **2. Hyper-Royalism and a Monochrome nation**

The military dictatorship will not allow the expression of any divergence from palace and royalist propaganda. The junta's view is that those who "think differently" may not express their views, and "they should keep their opinions to themselves." They are effectively using the mantle of hyper-royalism to stifle any dissent to military rule and will continue to delay any return to true democracy.

## **3. Royalist vigilantes and Social sanction**

Thailand's justice minister, General Paiboon Kumchaya, is on record encouraging people to break

the law, both at home and abroad. "Thailand's Justice Minister has said vigilantism is the best way to protect the monarchy, adding Thais should do the same with lèse-majesté committers living abroad." There have already been numerous attacks on people deemed to have been disrespectful to the monarchy, the reasons for the attacks can be trivial, e.g. not wearing black or even statements of simple facts like we are all mortal. In the current highly charged environment this break down of law and order could easily get out of control and we could have a repeat of past royalist purges where hundreds were brutally murdered.

#### **4. Rubbish Collection Organisation**

Dr Rienthong Nanna, a former operations director of the Royal Thai Army Medical Corp and fanatical royalist, is founder and leader of the Rubbish Collection Organisation. The objective of this organisation is to hunt down people they perceive as being anti-monarchy. Since the king's death this group have taken an even more extreme direction and are openly advertising for assassins to travel overseas and kill people who voice anti-monarchy sentiment. They are offering a substantial monetary reward for any persons or groups willing to carry out their plans.

#### **5. Lèse Majesté (article 112)**

The military junta have gone into overdrive with this tool of oppression. Since King Bhumibol Adulyadej's death on 13 October 2016, police have so far prosecuted 12 people for lèse majesté. Historically there were a handful of lèse majesté cases a year, we now get more than that in a week. Lèse majesté is used against those who oppose military dictatorship and is an almost guaranteed conviction with a term of up to 15 years for each deemed offence, e.g. send a text message and get 15 years, send 2 text messages and get 30 years. Hundreds of people have been incarcerated by the application of this archaic and medieval law and suspicious deaths in custody are not uncommon.

#### **6. Deteriorating economy**

The junta and hyper-royalists have declared an extended period of mourning for the king, a period of a year.

During this period all government workers must wear black and the public will be coerced, by social sanction, to do the same. Entertainment is discouraged, Halloween, Xmas and New Year festivities are cancelled, concerts for next year are already being cancelled, TV stations are not allowed to broadcast entertainment type shows and at the moment advertising is not allowed. For a country highly dependent on both foreign and domestic tourism this is going to generate a lot of hardship with reports already of significant drops in income. Mourning the King has taken on a competitive edge with people and organisations competing. Employers of foreign nationals have advised then not to visit bars or post any pictures on social media that depict involvement in any activities that could be construed as entertainment. In effect the country is being shut down for a year with both the economy and human rights deteriorating during that period.

#### **7. Political Persecutions**

An unstated objective of the military regime is to destroy all democratic forces, including Pheu Thai and the former popular elected PM, Yingluck Shinawatra. Yingluck was mandated by the electorate to implement a rice subsidy scheme (campaign policy) and like most farm subsidy schemes it lost money. The ruling military regime have now signed an order to hold Yingluck personally responsible for the scheme losses and have demanded over \$USD 1 billion in compensation. They did not even follow the normal legal process to conduct this farce but used a special instrument called an administrative order. They are effectively stripping her of all assets and saddling her with an un-

payable debt and potential substantial jail term to remove her from the political scene. Most neutral observers can agree that if there was a free and fair election tomorrow YL would easily win a majority so the junta are working overtime to end her political career.

Thai people continue to fight for democracy and many groups have been formed who don't accept the coup d'état and rule by military dictatorship, Seri Thai (Organisation of Free Thai for Human Rights and Democracy, FT-HD) is one such group, formed on June 24, 2014 to campaign for human rights and democracy. Seri Thai requests that the international community pays close attention to the human rights abuses happening in Thailand and request their support in returning Thailand to democracy with rule of law and basic human rights for all citizens. We also request that the International community assist us in achieving our goal of a return to democracy and human rights in Thailand.

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(European coordinator of the Organization of Free Thais for Human Rights and Democracy)

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