

Thailand: Royalists announce 'Operation Breaking Viet Cong's neck'

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BANGKOK — A hardline royalist network on Wednesday urged its supporters to file royal defamation complaints against critics of the monarchy and offered legal support to anyone who chooses to do so.

The Thai Phakdee group, led by pro-establishment activist Warong Dechgitvigrom, called his campaign "Operation Breaking Viet Cong's Neck," a response to recent statements issued by anti-government activists that [appear to promote communism](#).

"Right now they have internal conflicts and want to use Communism in Thailand, which led to a lot of backlashes, with 99 percent of people disagreeing with it," Warong said. "They have no clear goal."

He doubled down on the widespread crackdown of dissidents under [Article 112 of the Criminal Codes](#), or lese majeste, in recent weeks. Warong, a former Democrat Party executive, said the law should be used more, not less.

"We have lawyers available to collect all the evidence, write the case file, and send it back to you so you can file it at the police station near your home," Warong said. "This will make those trying to destroy Article 112 quit their efforts."

At least 25 people have been charged with lese majeste in the past month, the highest number in years. Those charged this week include a transgender woman accused of mocking the Royal Family [by wearing a traditional Thai dress](#), a 16-year-old minor, a protest volunteer guard, and an actress who [fundraised donations](#) for the protests.

Human Rights Watch representative Sunai Phasuk said he's concerned that an increasingly indiscriminate use of Article 112 could lead to vigilante actions by overzealous monarchy supporters.

"Police will also have to take up the cases out of fear that they, too, may be seen as disloyal," Sunai said.

Speaking at yesterday's news conference, Warong repeated a popular claim among the royalists that Thailand's lese majeste law, which carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in jail, is not out of step with the rest of the world.

"Every country in the entire world has Article 112," he said, referencing the United Kingdom and Netherlands.

In fact, the United Kingdom's lese majeste offense was abolished in 2010. The last prosecution under that law took place in 1715.

And while the Netherlands does retain lese majeste in its laws, the charge has a maximum punishment of four months – equivalent to insulting police officers, ambulance drivers, emergency room workers, and social workers.

The offense was last invoked in July 2016, when a man was jailed for 30 days for insulting King Willem-Alexander.

The Thai Phakdee group said it will also file a complaint to the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society on Thursday to call for tougher regulation of social media, where discussions about the monarchy are rarely restricted.

“Social media is a threat to national security and the monarchy institution,” Warong said.

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