

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > Thailand > Human Rights, law, justice (Thailand) > **The “First World Women’s Conference” in Thailand? - An urgent letter to Gen (...)**

The “First World Women’s Conference” in Thailand? - An urgent letter to Gen Secretary Fred van Leeuwen

Tuesday 12 October 2010, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 10 October 2010).

To: Fred van Leeuwen,
General Secretary,
Education International,
5 boulevard du Roi Albert II,
1210 Brussels,
Belgium

10/10/2010

Dear Sir

It has come to my notice that Educational International is to hold the “First World Women’s Conference” in Bangkok, Thailand, in January 2011.

I understand that Educational International represents teachers in schools and universities all over the world and that you defend freedom and Democracy. Yet Thailand is not a Democracy. I am a university lecturer in politics. I worked at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. In February 2006 I was forced to go into exile in the U.K. because I wrote an academic book criticising the 2006 military coup in Thailand. I was charged with lese majeste. Last year I was made an honorary member of English PEN, the writers’ organisation. Recently my colleague, Dr Sutachai Yimprasert at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, was arrested by the military because he opposed the military-installed government. He and I have never been involved in any violent actions. At present, Ms Darunee Charnchoengsilpakul is serving an 18 year prison sentence merely for making a public speech which criticised the King.

Recently, Ms Chiranuch Premchaiporn, web manager of the only independent Thai online newspaper Prachatai, was arrested for the second time on 24th September 2010, at Bangkok’s international airport. Ironically she was returning from the “Internet Liberty 2010” conference in Hungary. According to FACT (Freedom Against Censorship Thailand <http://facthai.wordpress.com/>) the charges against her under the computer crime law and lese majeste mean that Ms Chiranuch is facing 50 years in prison for comments she did not create. She is accused of not removing comments placed on the web-board quickly enough for the censors.

Thailand is being ruled by a repressive military regime fronted by military appointed civilian Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. Between April and May this year government soldiers deliberately shot and killed almost 90 unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators in Bangkok. Among the dead were emergency paramedics and foreign journalists who were systematically shot by army snipers. The level of censorship of all media and the numbers of political prisoners in Thai jails is unprecedented. The Emergency Decree, which is still in force in Bangkok, gives unlimited powers to the military.

University authorities have been told to monitor all student meetings.

In January 2010 Human Rights Watch reported that “in Thailand, there were growing crackdowns on protesters and other critics, including intensive surveillance of the internet, a failure to curb abuses by security forces in responding to the long time insurgency in the south, and serious breaches of the country’s obligations to protect refugees and asylum seekers.”

In a submission to the 14th session of the Human Rights Council in May 2010, the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) described the use of arbitrary orders for interrogation of civilians in army camps and other facilities under emergency regulations...

In a white paper released by international lawyer Robert Amsterdam, he stated that “for four years, the people of Thailand have been the victims of a systematic and unrelenting assault on their most fundamental right — the right to self-determination through genuine elections based on the will of the people.”

In the light of this, I sincerely hope that you will reconsider your decision to hold your meeting in Bangkok in January 2011. Thai women can never have equality so long as they do not have freedom and Democracy and at present Thai educators do not have academic freedom.

Yours sincerely,

Giles Ji Ungpakorn

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