

# Thailand: Open Letter in Support of Academics Summoned by Military, and Free and Open Discussion

Monday 21 August 2017, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 20 August 2017).

**The following open letter has been issued and signed by scholars, academics, and civil society members from across the world in support of the five academics and researchers who have been summoned by the military following the International Conference of Thai Studies (ICTS13), and to object to attempts by the state to control spaces of learning.**

**Prominent signatories from the international academic community include James C. Scott of Yale University, Jayati Ghosh of JNU, India, Tania Li of University of Toronto, Walden Bello of State University of New York at Binghamton and Philip McMichael of Cornell University.**

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## OPEN LETTER

To: General Prayut Chan-ocha, Prime Minister of Thailand, Government House, 1 Phitsanulok Road, Dusit 10300, Bangkok, Thailand

via Email: [renu.tkg@thaigov.go.th](mailto:renu.tkg@thaigov.go.th)

20 August 2017

Your Excellency,

We the undersigned – members of the international academic community and civil society organisations — hereby express our alarm and dismay at the Summons issued by Col Suebsakul Buarawong, deputy commander of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Military Circle in Chiang Mai, to Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Pakawadee Veerapatpong, Chaipong Samnieng, Nontawat Machai, and Thiramon Bua-ngam. They are accused of violating the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) chief's Order No.3/2015, Thailand's military regime's ban on political gatherings of five or more persons. Conviction on the charges against these five scholars entails imprisonment for up to one year. The summons seem to be a response to the organization of the International Conference on Thai Studies, the main international scholarly forum for presentation and discussion of research on Thailand and Southeast Asia more broadly. It has been held every three years since 1981, hosted by universities in Thailand, Australia, China, India, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. In July 2017 the conference was hosted by Chiang Mai University and achieved a record attendance of 1224 participants. The conference was a resounding success. It was chaired by Dr. Vaddhanaphuti.

Dr. Vaddhanaphuti is a highly respected academic in Thailand and internationally. He is a member

of the international editorial advisory board of the leading academic journal, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* ; co-editor of the globally popular ICAS small book series on agrarian change and peasant studies that is available in 10 language editions including Thai; coordinating team member of the global network BRICS Initiatives for Critical Agrarian Studies (BICAS); and coordinator of a large international consortium of academics and civil society groups studying the relationship between climate change mitigation politics, resource grabbing and conflict in Cambodia and Myanmar. The project is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).

Perhaps more importantly, Dr. Vaddhanaphuti has carried out cutting-edge scientific work on critical rural issues in Thailand that have direct policy implications. This is the reason why he is a deeply respected academic within academia, civil society and within Thai government ministries. His leading scientific works include research on: (1) traditional knowledge and genetic resources in the context of policy deliberations on intellectual property rights and trade (Ministry of Commerce); (2) multiculturalism and the condition and rights of displaced peoples, especially children, across the Thai-Myanmar border (Ministry of Education and Health); (3) the Voluntary National Review (VNR) for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation of Thailand for the United Nations last July 2017 (Foreign Ministry). Among his most recent research initiatives is his contribution to knowledge-policy work related to the 'sea gypsies/nomads' and some of the indigenous and native groups who have faced serious legal charges of encroaching into private tourist resorts and recently declared 'national reservation parks'. His work on this issue has introduced new ways of securing evidence beyond legal title deeds, such as village histories and DNA testing, resulting in court decisions favourable to the sea gypsies in Rawai, Phuket.

We respectfully urge the government of Thailand to:

1. Immediately withdraw the summons and implied charges against Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Ms Pakawadee Veerapatpong, Mr Chaipong Samnieng, Mr Nontawat Machai, and Mr Thiramon Buangam.
2. Facilitate and support academics and students in their conduct of scholarly teaching, research, public discussion and debate, on- and off-campus.
3. Ease the restriction on free and open discussion on pressing issues of concern to the wider Thai public, in line with Thailand's commitments to relevant international covenants.

The undersigned are international academics and civil society research organisations who have known, have worked with, or know the work of, Dr Vaddhanaphuti in various ways over the years.

We appreciate your attention and positive response to this matter that is very important not just to Dr Vaddhanaphuti and his colleagues, but to the international academic community as well.

Sincerely,

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*418 signatures as of August 20, 2016*

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**P.S.**

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