

Amnesty Thailand Skeptical About Those ‘Million Signatures’ To Kick It Out

Monday 7 February 2022, by [TANSKUL Nicky](#) (Date first published: 19 January 2022).

Amnesty International Thailand today cast doubt on the validity of a million signatures that an administration hardliner claimed to have gathered to “expel” it from the kingdom.

The Thai chapter of the human rights group questioned the validity of the signatures announced yesterday by Seksakol Atthawong, a redshirt turned ultranationalist in the prime minister’s office spearheading efforts to banish the group – and others like it – from the realm.

“At this point in time, Amnesty International is currently conducting an internal investigation regarding this matter,” Amnesty Thailand rep Naowarat Suasa-ard said, “Anybody can get a million signatures at any point in time.”

Seksakol, an assistant minister in the PM’s office, presented the petition to “expel” the group as he pushes legislation to severely curtail or even end the operations of NGOs like Amnesty. It would make it a crime for them to partake in activities deemed a threat to national security – a catch-all term for behavior the government doesn’t like – or foment opposition to its rule by creating dissidents.

“Amnesty International is an illicit organization that must be held accountable for its actions, and must be prosecuted to the fullest,” he said. “We should not give in to organizations that undermine national security.”

Amnesty International Thailand is a small chapter with all-Thai staff and leadership. It campaigns for human rights reforms and democracy, issues calls for the release of protesters and other political prisoners, calls attention to abuses, and advocates for legislation.

Seksakol’s bill would also require Amnesty and other organizations to disclose information regarding their funding and activities.

Seksakol is better known as Rambo Isaan for his allegiance to ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra before he swapped sides to the pro-military camp. He said the signatures must first be vetted by the Department of Provincial Administration to move forward.

Phil Robertson, deputy director for Human Rights Watch in Asia, called it “an existential threat against NGOs operating in Thailand” last year [in a joint statement](#).

“If this draft law passes, it will put Thai officials in the driver’s seat to run over the NGOs and migrant worker assistance groups who are the best sources of information about how Thailand fails to effectively tackle human trafficking and the continuous exploitation of vulnerable Thais and migrants,” Robertson said.

The push comes on the heels of a crackdown on the youth-led democracy movement decried by

rights groups. They have called world attention to the use of state violence to disperse the peaceful protests, which were waning before the resurgent pandemic effectively halted them again.

Groups have also taken aim at the revived use of the lese majeste law to charge at least 154 people since November 2020 with insulting the royal family, including protest movement leaders.

Nicky Tanskul

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Coconuts Bangkok

<https://coconuts.co/bangkok/news/amnesty-thailand-skeptical-about-those-million-signatures-to-kick-it-out/>