

UA 63/22

AI Index: ASA 39/5788/2022 of 4 July 2022

## **THAILAND**

### **SISTER OF ABDUCTED ACTIVIST CHARGED FOR CAMPAIGNING**

Human rights defender Sitanun Satsaksit has been working to ensure authorities in Cambodia and Thailand determine the fate and whereabouts of her brother after he was abducted while on the phone to her in 2020. Thai authorities charged her for her human rights work under Covid-19 emergency regulations, which they have used to suppress peaceful dissent. She has a court hearing scheduled for late August 2022 and would face up to four years' imprisonment for two criminal proceedings if prosecuted and found guilty. Amnesty International calls on the Thai authorities to drop all proceedings against Sitanun, and for a safe and enabling environment to be provided for all human rights defenders.

Proceedings against her under the 2005 Emergency Decree, invoked to control the Covid-19 pandemic, were initiated following her presence at a public assembly in Bangkok on 5 September 2021 and the presentation of a petition handed to the United Nations on 10 December 2021. In April 2022, an NGO reported that Sitanun's name and personal details appeared on a Thai security forces' watch-list alleged to have been passed to local police which may mean she is under unlawful surveillance.

Sitanun Satsaksit is a human rights defender who has been campaigning for an investigation into the abduction of her younger brother by unknown persons in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 4 June 2020. His fate and whereabouts are still unknown. The charges against Sitanun Satsaksit stem solely from her rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and are hindering her ability to campaign for her brother and for strengthened protection of human rights in Thailand.

#### **Write to the Minister of Justice urging him to:**

- drop all charges against Sitanun Satsaksit and others targeted under emergency powers for their peaceful human rights work and investigate reports that she may have been subjected to unlawful surveillance
- ensure the prompt adoption of the draft legislation criminalizing enforced disappearances and torture in a form which complies with Thailand's international obligations, including to recognize the rights of families of victims
- take all necessary steps to provide a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders

**Write to:**

His Excellency Somsak Thepsutin  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
404 ChaengWatthana Rd  
Thungsong-Hong, Laksi  
Bangkok 10210  
Thailand

E-mail: [Somsak.t@moj.go.th](mailto:Somsak.t@moj.go.th)

Salutation: Dear Minister:

**And Copy:**

His Excellency Kallayana Vipattipumiprates  
Ambassador  
The Royal Thai Embassy  
180 Island Park Drive  
Ottawa, ON K1Y 0A2

Fax: 613 7226624

Email: [contact@thaiembassy.ca](mailto:contact@thaiembassy.ca)

**Additional information**

Sitanun Satsaksit's last telephone conversation with her younger brother, Wanchalearm Satsaksit, a social and political activist, was interrupted when he was [abducted](#) by unknown persons in Cambodia. While she has tirelessly sought justice for him, his fate and whereabouts remain unknown and the circumstances of his abduction are yet to be clarified. The [measures](#) that Cambodian and Thai authorities have taken to investigate his disappearance result directly from Sitanun's advocacy. Thailand's Department of Special Investigations opened an investigation into his case in March 2022 – almost two years after his abduction.

Official measures to establish Wanchalearm's whereabouts have been limited and delayed. Cambodian authorities have failed to act promptly and investigate his abduction thoroughly, independently, and effectively. As well as trying to seek justice for her brother, [like many human rights defenders in Thailand](#), Sitanun is now also forced to dedicate her time and resources to defend herself against unwarranted criminal proceedings for peacefully exercising her rights and to determine whether she has been unlawfully surveilled.

Sitanun decided to speak out to help other relatives who face similar ordeals to secure justice and determine the fate and whereabouts of their family member after they have gone missing. She has joined civil society campaigns urging Thailand's House of Representatives to pass a delayed draft law criminalising enforced disappearances and torture. The law could lead to strengthening measures to investigate and prevent suspected enforced disappearances, in and outside Thailand.

The first set of criminal proceedings against her began following her speech in support of Thai parliament passing a law against torture and enforced disappearances at a peaceful rally on 5 September 2021, held at a busy intersection in central Bangkok. Police subsequently filed criminal proceedings under the Emergency Decree against Sitanun and others on the basis that a group of more than 25 people imposed a risk of spreading Covid-19. She is also accused of gathering with around a dozen activists on International Human Rights Day outside the UN Headquarters in Bangkok before submitting petitions about their human rights concerns – in her case, about Wanchalearm. Police started separate criminal proceedings against her and five others. If convicted on both counts, Sitanun would face up to four years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 80,000 baht (around \$2,250 USD).

Amnesty International has documented with concern how social and political activists, students and young people have been targeted and harassed by the Thai authorities under Covid-19 emergency powers. The authorities have used these regulations discriminatorily and have opened unfounded criminal proceedings against people that have peacefully exercised their rights, including in pro-democracy and reform protests held since May 2020. Among them are individuals who petitioned the Cambodian embassy or publicly gathered to call for an investigation to establish Wanchalearm's fate and whereabouts. Prosecutors and courts have previously dismissed several charges filed under the Emergency Decree, stating that individuals were exercising their constitutional rights and should therefore not be prosecuted or subject to penalties.