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Open letter to the authorities: Lack of effective investigation into the assault against human rights defender Mr. Sittichai

Phetpong Date de mise en ligne : Tuesday 19 January 2010

- [english] - Asia - Thailand -

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Open Letter to the to Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister of Thailand

Dear Prime Minister,

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), expresses its deep concern over the lack of effective investigation into the assault against Mr. **Sittichai Phetpong**, Vice-President of the Association to Protect Maritime Resources, an NGO in the south of Thailand, who has been working for the socially disadvantaged as well as for the preservation of natural resources and the environment. He has also played an important role in establishing and strengthening community organisations, as well as in the preservation of the resources of Songkhla Lake.

According to the information received from the Union for Civil Liberty (UCL), on November 27, 2009, at 8.30 am, Mr. Sittichai Phetpong was shot and severely wounded by a gunman on a motorcycle as he stepped out of his car to buy food at a wayside stall, in the Khanghe district of Haad Yai, Songkhla province. He received three bullets in the body and one bullet in the arm. In the past, Mr. Sittichai Phetpong had received many threats from those whose continued exploitation of natural resources was curtailed by his initiatives. He had reported those threats to Haat Yai police on May 31, 2009.

On December 3, 2009, representatives of various NGOs accompanied Mr. Sittichai Phetpong's father to submit a letter of complaint and demand for justice, addressed to the Governor of Songkhla province. Subsequently, the case was submitted to several senior police officers of the ninth region. Yet, no attempt has been made to interview the witnesses and no progress was made in the investigation.

On December 4 and 14, 2009, representatives of villagers and the Coordinating Committee of Non-Government Development Organisations reported the failure of the Puthawn police station in investigating the case to the Governor of Songkhla province and to the Chief of the police. Police Lieutenant General Wirayut, Commander of the ninth region, then announced that he would assign a new person to take charge of the investigation into Mr. Sittichai Phetpong's assault and appoint a special working group. He promised to achieve results within the "next ten days".

As no further results were achieved, on December 24, 2009, a new petition calling for an effective investigation was submitted to the Director of the Department of Special Investigation (DSI). Although a letter acknowledging receipt of the petition was received on December 29, stating that the matter would be investigated, no progress has yet been made in the investigation as of today. Meanwhile, Mr. Sittichai Phetpong remains in Songkhla University Hospital in a critical state.

In the light of the above-mentioned elements, the Observatory calls upon the Thai authorities to guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Sittichai Phetpong as well as of all human rights defenders in Thailand, and to order an immediate, thorough, effective and impartial investigation into his assault, the result of which must be made public, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law.

The Observatory more generally urges the authorities of Thailand to put an end to acts of harassment against all human rights defenders in the country [1], so as to conform with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights

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Defenders adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1998, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Thailand.

We express our sincere hope that you will take these considerations and requests into account.

Yours sincerely,

Souhayr Belhassen Eric Sottas

FIDH President OMCT Secretary General

[\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) For more information on cases of obstacles to the work of Thai human rights defenders, see in particular the 2009 Annual Report of the Observatory.