

Thailand must end harassment of researchers and human rights defenders

Embargoed for 19 July 2015

Around 30 NGOs and trade unions are demanding Thailand to end harassment of researchers and human rights defenders in the run-up to the final preliminary hearing in a criminal defamation and computer crimes case, brought by Natural Fruit against researcher and activist Andy Hall, on 20th July.

The undersigned organisations are also disappointed to learn that Thailand's Attorney General is trying to get another, already dismissed, case against Andy Hall re-opened.

– Attorney General's appeal against a case that has already been thrown out of a court has no grounds whatsoever. Thailand is continuing to harass a human rights defender despite a court decision and its obligation to uphold freedom of speech, said Finnwatch Executive Director Sonja Vartiala.

Natural Fruit has filed multiple criminal and civil cases against Andy Hall since February 2013 as a result of his contribution to a Finnwatch report published in 2013. The report revealed serious human rights violations at Natural Fruit's pineapple juice production facilities on the basis of workers' interviews. Natural Fruit refused to comment on the research findings before the publication of the report.

– The allegations against Andy Hall who interviewed workers for the report, are ridiculous. Finnwatch bears the responsibility for the publication and contents of the report, not Hall, said Vartiala.

For example the Thai Ministry of Labour has confirmed the findings of the workers' interviews in its own inadequate investigation. The findings have also been confirmed by a Natural Fruit employee who gave testimony in court. To date no one has been held responsible for the human rights violations at the Natural Fruit plant.

– Thai authorities must show that they do not turn a blind eye to illegalities. We demand the Thai government to take Natural Fruit to court for labour rights violations, said Vartiala.

Natural Fruit has brought altogether four separate cases against Andy Hall. After Monday's final preliminary hearing on the criminal defamation and computer crimes case, the court will decide whether to indict Andy Hall or not. If the court decides to indict him, Andy Hall will be arrested and detained pending bail. He then faces a trial and if found guilty and convicted, up to seven years in prison.

The US State Department downgraded Thailand to a Tier 3 ranking in its 2014 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. The TIP-report recommended that Thailand cease prosecuting criminal defamation cases against researchers or journalists who report on human trafficking, and recognise the valuable role of NGOs and workers' organisations in uncovering the nature and scope of human trafficking in Thailand.

– The actions of the Thai authorities go clearly against the recommendations in the US government report on human trafficking, said Vartiala.

The undersigned organisations also want to draw attention to the role of Natural Fruit in Thailand's pineapple industry. The owner of Natural Fruit is the president of one of the two pineapple industry

associations in Thailand, the Thailand Pineapple Industry Association TPIA. In response to earlier calls on other TPIA members to urge Natural Fruit to drop charges against Andy Hall, TPIA issued threats of further legal action instead.

– The continuing leadership position of Natural Fruit in Thailand's pineapple industry should be a cause of concern also for all customers of other TPIA member companies. By siding with Natural Fruit, the other TPIA members have shown great disregard for human rights and freedom of expression – a worrying attitude to have as an employer in a sector rife with labour rights violations, said Vartiala.

The undersigned organisations have also written an Open Letter to the Prime Minister of Thailand on the case. The letter is available at:

http://finnwatch.org/images/OpenLetter_PMThailand_AHCase_July2015.pdf

Signatories:

International

1. Fortify Rights
2. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
3. International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
4. International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF)
5. UNI Global Union
6. International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)
7. Walk Free Movement to end modern slavery
8. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Asia / Pacific

9. Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)
10. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC), Cambodia
11. Equitable Cambodia
12. State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation (SERC), Thailand
13. Transient Workers Count Too, Singapore
14. Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Europe

15. Burma Campaign UK, United Kingdom
16. Fairfood International, Netherlands
17. Finnish Food Workers' Union (SEL), Finland
18. Finnish League for Human Rights
19. Finnwatch, Finland
20. Industrial Union TEAM, Finland
21. Kepa, Finland
22. Polish Institute for Human Rights and Business, Poland
23. Service Union United (PAM), Finland
24. Trade Union Pro, Finland
25. Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors (JHL), Finland
26. Trades Union Congress (TUC), United Kingdom
27. Union of Health and Social Care Professionals (Tehy), Finland

North America

28. Fair World Project, United States
29. International Labor Rights Forum, United States