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## Thailand: support requested for peoples' rally

Four thousand representatives of rural, poor and ethnic communities within the upper nine provinces of Northern Thailand rallied at the Provincial Office in Chiangmai early on the 25th of April. These representatives of the people have released the following statement:

Stop the violation of community rights and protect the dignity of human beings

Thailand announced the acceptance of the new Royal Thai Constitution in October of 1997, a decree of the commitment to the protection of the rights and liberties of the Thai population in many categories including the civil rights of all people within Thailand and the right to utilize resources. However it has been almost two years since the acceptance of the current Constitution and the protection or acknowledgement of the expressed rights of villagers have yet to be seen. On the contrary the rights of the people have been continually violated, the rights to manage their resources and the basic right to citizenship as shown by the intimidation and threats used by government officials and the emergence of increasing tension and conflict between village communities and other sections of Thai society.

In the management of natural resources throughout Thailand government employees continue to use the policies and laws which date from half a century before the new Constitution in the claiming of the power to violate the rights of the people, and local communities living in forested areas by forbidding the communities to use the local resources even for basic needs in maintaining their livelihoods. In addition to this there have been moves to relocate communities from their residential and cultivation areas which they have inhabited for many generations.

An aspect of the violation of the rights and intimidation of communities are the instances of the abuse of their legal rights. For instance the officials of the Royal Forestry Department, using the authority of the Forest Law of 1941, arrested Mr. Mongkhol Rukyingprasert from the Wang Watershed area in Chiangmai Province for harvesting timber from the community forest area for the construction of a house. In another instance Mr. Pol Payoe, a member of the Karen, or Pgakenyaw, ethnic group in Chiangdao District of Chiangmai Province was arrested for his collection of dead timber over a period of ten years, timber used for repairs on his home. A third example of this phenomenon is the increasing demands for, and use of influence and power to force the relocation of the Hmong communities in Pha Klang sub-district, Pua district in Nan Province, although this is but a single example of a much wider phenomenon.

Regarding the violation of the civil rights of all Thai people, there still exists the legal power to perpetrate these violations. A recent example can be found in the arrest of community members belonging to the Palong ethnic group in the community of Pang Daeng in Chaingdao District of Chiangmai Province. Fifty six members of this community were arrested without any statement of the reason for their arrest. Another instance is the continued practice of treating members of ethnic communities as separate from the Thai majority and using this as a pretence, or excuse, for the removal of their lands.

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The Northern Farmers Network in the name of peoples networks to conserve the forest who face a violation of their rights resulting from the declaration of protected forest areas which enclose areas traditionally used for cultivation, and the Assembly of Ethnic Minorities, Northern Thai Section in the name of peoples networks of ethnic minorities who face a violation of their human rights resulting from discrimination by government officials have combined with a number of democratic peoples organizations. These organizations combined to peacefully protest these violations according to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, Article 44, and have the following demands:

1. The Government must implement changes in the forestry laws, specifically in the following four legal instruments; Forestry Law of 1941, National Reserve Forest Law of 1964, Wildlife Sanctuary Law of 1964, National Park Law of 1961 and the Cabinet Resolution of the 30th of June 1998. All these laws violate the existing rights of the people over the management of resources, are not in line with reality within Thailand and are in conflict with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, the highest law in the Kingdom.
2. The Government must immediately implement the issuance of the Community Forest Bill in order to give the rights of conservation and forest management to local communities and to restrict the authority and power of government officials so that they are unable to use their authority to continue to exploit local resources for personal gain.
3. The Government must review and change the laws regarding the issuance of citizenship and issue citizenship to ethnic minorities within Thailand. This must be done with review of international laws, declaration of revolution and/or regulations and other legal instruments pertinent to the issuance of citizenship. The restrictive, limited and repetitive nature of citizenship registration laws must be examined and amended including details of the Citizenship Issuance Committee, their mandate and the criteria for qualifying for citizenship. In the meantime the continuing project issuing alien status to all ethnic minorities according to the law passed on the 3rd of October 1995 should be slowed as it is applied to all areas and peoples uniformly, until the laws can be amended.
4. The Government must withdraw the legal documents, uncertain by law, which deny the existing areas of public or communal use and halt the declaration of public ownership in traditional cultivation areas.
5. During the process of resolution of these problems arrests based on current laws, intimidation, threats and the violation of the rights of local communities should be immediately stopped in order to prevent the tension and conflict already existing from escalating further until the appropriate changes have been made to the laws in question and statutes are in place to solve the problems.

In solidarity: Northern Farmers Network, Assembly of Thai Ethnic Minorities, Assembly of the Poor  
Temporary Coordinating Office: email: [ethnet@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:ethnet@loxinfo.co.th) web page:  
<http://www.cm.ksc.co.th/~cesd/>

The people gathered at the Chiangmai rally request our readers to send a letter of support for their cause to the Prime Minister of Thailand, Mr. Chuan Leekpai, expressing both your support for previous efforts of the government to solve these problems and your hope for immediate movement on this issue.

A copy of any letters you might write should also be forwarded to the temporary coordinating office of the peoples' rally and the following cooperating organizations in order that they can be translated and shared with the people as a demonstration of international support. Please send your letters to:

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Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Office of the Prime Minister, Government House, Bangkok, Thailand, Fax : 66 2 629 9211

Northern Development Foundation and the Northern Farmers Network, Fax : 66 53 810 623 - 4,  
email: [ndf13@chmai.loxinfo.co.th](mailto:ndf13@chmai.loxinfo.co.th)

Northern Farmers Network, Fax : 66 53 212 617

Assembly of the Poor, Fax 66 2 281 1916,