



July 30, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. N.W.
Washington D.C., 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

RE: The ASEAN Ministerial Meetings and Amnesty International's Human Rights Concerns in Thailand

In advance of your travel to Thailand, Amnesty International urges you to inform the Thai authorities of your concerns regarding serious and ongoing human rights violations in the country. In light of the fact that the recent elections took place in a heavily restricted environment for human rights—including the country's ongoing restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, court cases against peaceful critics, continued powers of arbitrary detention, and uninvestigated violence against activists—the United States should continue to pressure the Thai government to take necessary steps to improve its respect for human rights. It is essential that U.S. officials make clear that as long as judicial harassment and arbitrary detention of peaceful dissenters continue, U.S. policy toward Thailand will not change.

In the last year, there has been a new and growing crackdown on the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. This suppression follows measures including the dissolving of a political party before the elections, filing multiple criminal complaints against the Future Forward Party prior to and after the elections.

The Thai military authorities retain nearly unlimited powers, as granted to the Head of the NCPO under Section 44 of the interim Constitution. While authorities have recently lifted a number of repressive and unwarranted bans on political activity and exercise of the rights to peaceful assembly and expression, authorities continue to file new criminal complaints against peaceful critics and retain powers of arbitrary detention and censorship.

It is critical that, in light of these actions, the United States insist that the authorities take further steps to protect human rights. In affirming Thailand's government without mentioning these abuses, the U.S. government would be implicitly encouraging the continuation of repressive actions that threaten the future of human rights in the country and, indeed, in the region as a whole.

These concerns extend beyond restrictions on freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and privacy. In addition, Amnesty International has long-standing concerns regarding the state's failure to act to prevent or investigate grave violations including torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, and regarding the treatment of refugees and migrants.

Systemic torture and ill-treatment by the military continues to be facilitated by emergency laws and decrees allowing individuals to be detained without charge or trial in unofficial places of detention. The delay in passing the draft Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act, which would criminalize both torture and enforced disappearances, and hinders families of the disappeared from claiming their rights and seeking redress.

Moreover, the state has long failed both to protect activists and community rights defenders from violent attacks and unlawful killings by non-state actors, and also to investigate such killings effectively.

Finally, Thailand has held refugee and asylum seekers indefinitely, in extremely poor conditions in immigration detention centers. Despite committing to avoid forcibly returning individuals to countries where they are at genuine risk of torture or other serious human rights violations, the Thai authorities have continued to forcibly return individuals, including recognized refugees. In addition, Thailand's push-back of boats with Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants and people seeking asylum has put lives at risk and denied individuals their right to seek international protection. The Thai authorities should be encouraged to uphold these commitments and be held accountable if they do not.

With these concerns in mind, it is our hope that you carefully consider the Thai government's continuing poor human record, and continue to raise concerns with the authorities when you visit the country, including in any remarks relating to the recent elections.

Sincerely,



Francisco Bencosme
Director, Asia Pacific Advocacy
Amnesty International USA