



Covering events from January - December 2000

THAILAND

Kingdom of Thailand

Head of state: King Bhumibol Adulyadej

Head of government: Chuan Leekpai

Capital: Bangkok

Population: 60.6 million

Official language: Thai

Death penalty: retentionist

2000 treaty ratifications/signatures:

Optional Protocol to the UN Women's Convention; Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court



In January, 10 Myanmar nationals were shot dead by the security forces after they had taken patients and staff of Raatchaburi Hospital hostage. The same month, one Myanmar national convicted of drugs trafficking was executed. At least one person reportedly died as a result of torture by police. Poor prison conditions, including severe overcrowding, continued to be reported. More than 14,000 asylum-seekers from the Karen and Karenni ethnic minorities in Myanmar entered refugee camps, whose population increased to 115,000. More than 100,000 Shan asylum-seekers from Myanmar continued to be denied access to camps in Thailand. Several Myanmar nationals were forcibly returned to Myanmar where they were at risk of human rights violations. The Prime Minister dissolved parliament in November, and in consultation with the Elections Commission, set the election date for January 2001.

Hostage-taking and extrajudicial executions

In January, 10 heavily armed Myanmar nationals believed to be led by the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors, who in October 1999 seized the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok, took hundreds of patients and staff hostage at Raatchaburi Hospital. The group reportedly demanded medical assistance for people in Kamaplaw, a settlement in Myanmar near Thailand, which was controlled by God's Army, a Karen armed opposition group. Kamaplaw had been attacked by the Myanmar army and reportedly shelled by the 9th Division of the Thai First Army. Security forces secured Raatchaburi Hospital less than 24 hours after its seizure, shooting dead all 10 men, although no civilian casualties were reported. Some of the 10 were reportedly extrajudicially executed after they had surrendered, but no investigation was known to have been conducted. In October the bodies of nine of the men, which remained unclaimed by relatives, were cremated in Raatchaburi by the authorities. One body had previously been claimed by a Muslim organization for burial.

Refugees and migrant workers

About 1,000 refugees from Myanmar were resettled to third countries from Maneloy camp as part of the Thai authorities' ongoing policy to ensure the resettlement of all Myanmar political opposition activists. In February Myanmar national Saw Tin Oo was forcibly returned by the Thai authorities to Myanmar, where he was arrested, tried and sentenced to death by the Myanmar authorities.

Migrant workers and asylum-seekers from Myanmar continued to be arrested throughout the year, held in poor conditions in Immigration Detention Centres and forcibly returned to the Myanmar-Thai border. In February, in the aftermath of the January hospital siege and in the run-up to an international UN meeting in Bangkok, thousands of Myanmar nationals were arrested in Bangkok alone. Migrant workers and asylum-seekers from countries which do not border Thailand were arrested for "illegal immigration" and were forced to remain in Immigration Detention Centres for long periods.

In January about 1,000 Karen asylum-seekers fled to Thailand after attacks by the Myanmar army on the Me Pia base of the Karen National Union, the main Karen armed opposition group in Myanmar. The asylum-seekers were forcibly returned to Myanmar by the First Army's 9th Division. A few days later, after further attacks by the Myanmar army resulting in civilian casualties, the same group fled again, and were allowed to remain at Bo Wii, Raatchaburi Province. The First Army's 9th Division initially blocked them from entering refugee camps but they were moved to Don Yang refugee camp in February.

In January, after the attack on Kamaplaw, more than 400 Karen asylum-seekers fled to Thailand. Some 50 Karen male asylum-seekers from this group "disappeared" after having been arrested by the 9th Division, reportedly for national security reasons. AI had no further information about their fate.

More than 100,000 Shan asylum-seekers who had fled human rights violations in Myanmar continued to be denied access to refugee camps and were treated by the Thai authorities as "illegal immigrants", liable to arrest and deportation.

Political imprisonment

Sok Yoeun, a Cambodian refugee and prisoner of conscience in Thailand, was arrested in December 1999 for "illegal immigration" and detained throughout the year pending possible extradition to Cambodia. The Cambodian government accused him of involvement in a rocket attack on Prime Minister Hun Sen's motorcade in September 1998, but there was no evidence linking him to the attack.

Ramlek Nilnuan, an adviser to the non-governmental organization Forum of the Poor, was arrested in July for trespassing in a national park and remained held without trial. His arrest was related to a land dispute between the Royal Forestry Department and villagers in Kalasin Province, and he appeared to be a prisoner of conscience.

Torture/ill-treatment

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In February Chamlong Khamsunthorn died in police custody in Ayuthaya Province, reportedly as a result of severe beatings and electric shocks. No independent investigation was known to have been conducted.

About 200,000 prisoners nationwide were reportedly held in prisons with a

capacity of 80,000. Women's facilities were particularly crowded as increasing numbers of women have been arrested for possession of small amounts of illegal drugs. Conditions in Klong Prem in Nonthaburi province near Bangkok and in Chonburi, Phuket, Songkhla, Surat Thani, and Chiang Mai Prisons were also especially poor. Prisoners on death row were held in iron shackles continuously. Conditions in Immigration Detention Centres, which were supervised by the police, continued to be poor after mass arrests of migrant workers, but in general improved.

Death penalty

A bill banning the death penalty for people under 18 was introduced by the Attorney General's Office to the Cabinet in December in order to bring Thailand's law into compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Thailand acceded to in 1997.

Hla Win, a Myanmar national convicted of drug trafficking, was executed in January. Some 130 prisoners were under sentence of death at Bangkwang Prison. At least 45 death sentences were passed during 2000.

Legal developments

In May the government released a censored version of a Ministry of Defence report about the military's violent suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations in Bangkok in May 1992, in which at least 52 people were killed. After protests from the relatives of victims, the government released a largely uncensored version in June, but calls by the relatives to bring those found responsible to justice remained unanswered.

In October the newly-elected Senate elected nine of 11 National Human Rights Commissioners stipulated in the 1997 Constitution. By the end of the year the remaining two Commissioners had still not been elected, making it impossible for the Commission to convene.

AI country reports and visits

Statement

- Kingdom of Thailand: Justice denied eight years after Bangkok massacre (AI Index: [ASA 39/002/2000](#))

Visit

AI delegates visited Thailand in February and March.
