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For immediate release on 5 November 2014

Press Release

Suppression of freedom of expression must be stopped

By Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR)

On 3 November 2014, 12 civil society organizations and 17 individuals have issued a joint statement declaring their opposition to the reform process initiated by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). In their statement, it was clearly explained how they cannot accept the seizure of power by the coup and the NCPO and they therefore cannot cooperate with any mechanisms or apparatus stemming from the coup including the cabinet, the National Legislative Assembly, and the National Reform Council. They adamantly declare their refusal to participate in any forums or process initiated by the cabinet, the National Legislative Assembly, and the National Reform Council since all these mechanisms are weakening people's sector making it impossible to hold the state accountable for their policies, laws or any development projects after the coup.

Thai Lawyers for Human Rights Center (TLHR) was informed on 4 November 2014 that the individuals who have signed their names in the statement have received phone calls from local military personnel. Some of them have found their homes being raided by fully armed military officials, administrative officials and the police and they were taken away and asked to give information to the authorities. Two of them have gone to report themselves to the military at the Prachak Military Camp in Udon Thani. Apparently, the military officials asked about their motives in issuing the statement. Upon their release, they were forced to sign a document indicating their obligation to immediately present themselves to the authorities once summoned. Other individuals in other provinces including Mahasarakham and Khon Kaen may present themselves and meet the military authorities as summoned later.

TLHR feels deeply concernedly about the operation of the military officials as follows;

1. The issuance of the public statement is simply an exercise of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which provides that everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference and Thailand is obliged to observe it. That the military officials summoned the individuals to meet simply because their issuance of the statement shall inevitably inflict the climate of fear in public and is in itself an act to stifle the right to freedom of expression.
2. Even though Thailand is ruled under Martial which authorizes military officials to hold a person in custody not more than seven days, but the exercise of such power is only possible only to when there is a reasonable ground to suspect that any person is the enemy or violates the provisions of this Act or the order of the military authority. The law does not provide a blank cheque for the military officials to act arbitrarily as it has happened thus far.
3. The act of the military officials simply reiterates that the points raised in the statement by the 12 civil society organizations that under military coup rule, it is impossible for people to hold the state accountable for their policies, laws or any development projects, since even a criticism made in good faith is not allowed.

TLHR demands that the military stop suppressing the exercise of the right to freedom of expression of the individuals and other groups and repeal Martial Law countrywide as well as observe the rule of law in their governing of the country. Reform shall not take place without an effort to listen to opinions from all parties and without the enforcement of law equally among all people.

With Respect in sovereign power of the people
Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR)