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Thailand: Ongoing judicial harassment of women human rights defenders

On 23 November 2020, the Bangkok South Criminal Court began hearing the combined case against women human rights defenders **Angkhana Neelapaijit**, **Puttanee Kangkun**, and **Thanaporn Saleephol**. The three women human rights defenders are facing defamation charges brought against them by a Thai chicken company, Thammakaset Company Limited, for their social media posts expressing support for other human rights defenders who were being judicially harassed by the company. The next preliminary hearing on the case is to be held on 18 and 25 January 2021.

[Angkhana Neelapaijit](#) is a woman human rights defender and the former Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand. She started her human rights activism after her husband, a prominent human rights lawyer, disappeared in March 2004. The WHRD is the founder of Justice for Peace Foundation, a human rights organisation that works to help the victims of human rights abuses in Thailand. She was also awarded the 2019 Magsaysay Award for her contribution towards human rights work in Thailand. [Puttanee Kangkun](#) is the Senior Human Rights Specialist at the NGO Fortify Rights. Prior to joining Fortify Rights she worked with several Thai human rights organizations. [Thanaporn Saleephol](#) is the former Communications Associate at Fortify Rights.

On 23 November 2020, the Bangkok South Criminal Court began its preliminary hearing into the combined case brought against the three women human rights defenders Angkhana Neelapaijit, Puttanee Kangkun, and Thanaporn Saleephol. The case brought before the court by Thammakaset Company Limited, combines four different complaints, which include a total of 28 counts of criminal defamation for 28 postings or re-postings on social media. The posts in question were made by the women human rights defenders to express support for other human rights defenders facing judicial harassment by the company for documenting labour rights abuses. Angkhana Neelapaijit faces a total of two counts, Puttanee Kangkun faces 21 counts, and Thanaporn Saleephol faces five counts.

This case brought against the defenders is not an isolated incident. Since 2016, the company has filed at least 37 complaints against 22 human rights defenders. While many of these cases have been dismissed or ruled against the company by the courts, several cases still remain open. The company's constant judicial harassment of the human rights defenders who speak out against labour rights violations within the company has created an environment of fear and reprisal, causing many to be afraid to speak up about the abuses that are reportedly occurring.

In March 2020, experts from the UN [condemned](#) the judicial harassment of the human rights defenders by the company and called for the country to follow through on its commitments made under the [National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights](#), which facilitate to “push review, amendment and abolition of laws, as well as relevant mechanisms, to facilitate the protection of human rights defenders”.

Front Line Defenders condemns the ongoing judicial harassment of women human rights defenders Angkhana Neelapaijit, Puttanee Kangkun, and Thanaporn Saleephol, as it believes they are being targeted solely for their legitimate and peaceful work for the protection of human rights, specifically on labour rights in Thailand. It urges the Thai government to create an environment that is respectful of the fundamental right of the freedom of expression, which is guaranteed under the Constitution and, by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Thailand is a State Party.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Thailand to:

1. Immediately cease the judicial harassment of Angkhana Neelapaijit, Puttanee Kangkun, and Thanaporn Saleephol, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the women human rights defenders;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Thailand are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.