

Update on charges against ICTS13 attendees



Editor's note: the following update has been prepared by colleagues of Prof Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, and has been forwarded to New Mandala for readers' information.

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On 21 August, 2017, Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti along with four other attendees of the 13th International Conference on Thai Studies, Pakawadee Veerapatpong, Chaipong Samnieng, Nontawat Machai and Thiramon Bua-ngam, were officially charged with violating Order No. 3/2015 of the Head of the National Council for Peace and Order. The order from Thailand's military regime bans political gatherings of five or more persons. The five accused proceeded to Chang Phuak police station to report per the police summons. Dr. Chayan stated that all the accused have refused the charges. Police investigators have summoned the accused to return to the police station to submit written statements on 1 September 2017.

The head of the police investigative team has officially informed the accused to acknowledge the charges filed by the military, per the following:

According to the charges, announced by police investigators on 18 August 2017, the five accused

put up signs reading “This is an academic forum, not a military camp” on the wall of a seminar room of the Chiang Mai International Exhibition and Convention Center during the Thai Studies conference, and took photos with the signs.

Per the charges filed with the police, this was meant to be a symbolic act of political resistance; the signs were easily noticed by attendees and could be disseminated online to anti-government groups to provoke and incite political unrest, which could result in a larger tide of negative, anti-government resistance.

The charges, filed by the military, state that the accused carried signs written with “This is an academic forum, not a military camp” and raised their hands in a 3-finger symbolic salute for photos—a violation of section 12 of order 3/2558 by the head of the NCPO, which forbids political gatherings of five or more persons.

A group of academics have now established the “Network for Academic Freedom and Social Justice” as a coordinating center for information regarding the case.

They said that they, as well as supporters of the accused, were baffled by the charges being pressed against the five figures.

They said that they July forum provided a stage for academic exchanges on Thai studies covering various disciplines including linguistics, economics, society, and politics. Foreign academics also attended.

Some people held up placards at the forum that read "Universities Are Not Barracks".

The academics at the press conference said these were meant to denounce the security authorities' alleged covert presence to monitor activities at the forum.

The charges against the five are seen as a threat to academic freedom of expression.

The academic demanded the charges be dropped.

At Chang Phuek police station yesterday, the five suspects were greeted by supporters who include activists, university students, and lecturers.

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Header image: Prof Chayan Vaddhanaphuti outside Chang Phuek police station on 21 August 2017. (Photo posted to a public Facebook page)