

## THAILAND

### AUTHORITIES BLOCK MARCH, CHARGE PARTICIPANTS

**Authorities arrested 16 individuals during a march to deliver a petition to the prime minister. The petition requested the shelving of plans for a coal-fired power plant. The individuals may face criminal charges.**

On 24 November villagers, local leaders and environmental activists began a march from the location of a proposed coal-burning power plant in Thepha district, Songkhla province to the site of a meeting of Thailand's cabinet in Muang district, Songkhla province. The group intended to deliver a petition to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to oppose the construction of the power plant. According to government officials, authorities had arranged for the group to meet with another official from the prime minister's office, but the group persisted in their attempt to deliver the letter to the prime minister himself.

On the afternoon of 27 November, police and military personnel in riot gear blocked the progress of the group, then numbering about 100, on a road as they neared the venue of the Cabinet meeting. A scuffle subsequently broke out between the security forces and protesters. Both police and protesters reported minor injuries.



Police took 16 marchers into custody on November 27, potentially violating their rights to freedom of expression and of assembly. *Via Twitter*

The police arrested 16 protesters, and took them to the police station in Muang district. These individuals were subsequently charged for offenses relating to the obstruction of a public roadway and the use of violence against police officers.

On 28 November, Songkhla Provincial Court set bail for 15 individuals at 90,000 baht (US\$ 2,800) and remanded them into police custody. The other individual, a 16-year-old youth, was released on bail at 5,000 baht (US\$ 150) on the same day. On 29 November, the other 15 individuals were released after university

lecturers offered to serve as guarantors for the detainees. On 30 November police officials stated that they were preparing arrest warrants for a further 20 individuals who had participated in the march. It is possible that additional arrest warrants may be issued in the coming weeks.

**Please send a fax, email or letter without delay.** (Postage is \$2.50.)

\* Ask the authorities to drop all charges against activists involved in the 27 November march that stem from the peaceful exercise of their human rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

\* Call on the government to publicly affirm the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and take steps to ensure the physical safety and security of individuals seeking to exercise these rights.

**Here is the contact information you need:**

Prayut Chan-O-Cha  
Government House  
Phitsanulok road  
Bangkok 10300, Thailand  
Fax: 011 66 2282 5131  
Email: [prforeign@gmail.com](mailto:prforeign@gmail.com)  
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Commander General of Royal Thai Police  
Pol. Gen Chakthip Chaijinda  
Royal Thai Police Headquarters  
Rama 1 Road  
Pathum Wan  
Bangkok 10330, Thailand  
Fax: 011 66 2251 4739  
Salutation: Dear Commissioner General

**Please send a copy to**

His Excellency Vijavat Isarabhakdi  
Ambassador, The Royal Thai Embassy  
180 Island Park Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1Y 0A2  
Fax: (613) 722-6624  
Email: [contact@thaiembassy.ca](mailto:contact@thaiembassy.ca)

Minister of Justice  
Prajin Jantong  
Ministry of Justice  
Government Centre Building A  
120 Moo 3, Chaengwattana Road  
Bangkok 10210, Thailand  
Fax: 011 66 2953 0503  
Salutation: Dear Minister

## **Additional information**

Plans by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand -- a state enterprise under the Ministry of Energy -- to build coal-burning power plants in Songkhla and other southern provinces have been opposed by communities and environmental activists concerned about potential negative impacts on health, livelihoods and the environment. Local residents and activists opposed to the construction of the plant in Thepha district, Songkhla province have reported having had limited access to government officials and being prevented by the army from attending public hearings on the project. In July 2015, military personnel prevented groups opposing the project from gathering outside the public hearings. An environmental and health impact study of the plant has been completed and is scheduled to be examined by relevant authorities, including the National Environment Board.

In the days following the arrests in Songkhla province, members of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights called for the detainees to be released and all charges against them to be dropped. Since coming to power in a military coup in May 2014, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has severely restricted the right to freedom of assembly. Among other actions, the NCPO has strictly enforced a ban on "political gatherings" of five or more persons and has passed a restrictive Public Assembly Act. Authorities declared the march in Songkhla province to be illegal per the terms of the Public Assembly Act after declining to give permission to the march organizers.

Opponents of large-scale coal-fired power projects are concerned that executive orders issued by the ruling military government may facilitate the construction of such projects without adequate consultation of local communities. The Prime Minister has used sweeping powers under Article 44 of interim constitution to issue Head of NCPO Order 4/2016 and 9/2016, which exempt development projects from urban planning and environmental regulations, and to amend environmental laws to bypass scrutiny of certain activities.

Community activists opposing infrastructural and development projects in Thailand have faced threats, violence and judicial harassment, including criminal defamation proceedings, as a result of their activism.