

For Immediate Release  
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## **Thailand must cease prosecution of human rights defenders**

*Global coalition of 110 organizations call on Prime Minister Prayut for reforms*

Thailand's use of criminal defamation laws and the Computer Crimes Act to prosecute human rights defenders violates its international obligations and increases risk for businesses that source goods from Thailand, said a coalition of 110 civil society groups, worker organizations, businesses and members of the European Parliament in an open letter sent to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha today to mark International Human Rights Day, that was commemorated on Dec 10<sup>th</sup>. The letter highlighted the conviction of migrant rights defender Andy Hall as a dangerous precedent that would make it more difficult for migrant workers to ensure their rights are respected.

Bangkok South Criminal Court found Hall guilty of criminal defamation and computer crimes on September 20, 2016 and handed down to him a 3 year suspended prison sentence and a fine of 150, 000 baht. Hall is appealing the verdict to the Appeals Court. The charges related to a report published by Finnwatch, a Finnish civil society organization, which outlined allegations of serious human rights violations at a pineapple processing facility owned by Natural Fruit Company Ltd (see [www.andyjhall.wordpress.com](http://www.andyjhall.wordpress.com) for more information on the case).

“Already we are seeing other abusive employers follow Natural Fruit's lead and use criminal defamation and the Computer Crimes Act to bring cases against migrant workers who speak out when trapped in illegal working conditions, and against activists who work to protect these individuals,” said Abby McGill, campaigns director with the International Labor Rights Forum, a signatory to the letter. “These laws have a dangerous chilling effect and punish victims for seeking remedy, rather than those who commit crimes against them.”

In November 2016, a chicken farm supplying to Thai poultry export giant Betagro initiated charges of criminal defamation against 14 migrant workers from Myanmar who allege they worked in [extremely exploitative conditions](http://www.generosity.com/fundraising/support-abused-migrant-chicken-workers-legal-cases) on a Betagro chicken farm (see <https://www.generosity.com/fundraising/support-abused-migrant-chicken-workers-legal-cases> for more information on the case). The company has since pursued a raft of criminal defamation and computer crimes charges against Hall also, as international affairs advisor to the Migrant Workers Rights Network, a migrant worker rights organisation that has supported the workers.

To prevent similar cases in the future, and increase confidence among international buyers that Thai goods are produced in acceptable working conditions, the letter signed by 110 global signatories urges the Royal Thai Government to: 1. repeal the provisions in the Penal Code criminalizing defamation; 2. amend the Computer Crime Act to bring it into compliance with international human rights law regarding freedom of expression; 3. Actively and effectively implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders; and 4. Ratify and implement ILO Core Labor Conventions, particularly No. 87 and No. 98.

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