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Protect Community Rights Defenders, Protect Khlong Sai Community from Eviction

The intensification of the struggle to defend land and peasant communities as well as the violence used by capitalists to grab land resources have resulted in many community rights defenders being arrested and prosecuted. Moreover, many have also been intimidated by influential persons, or even murdered.

Mr. Chai Boonthonglek was a community rights defender and a senior leader of Khlong Sai Community, which is a member of the Southern Peasants Federation of Thailand (SPFT). He was murdered on 11 February 2015. His murder took place against the backdrop of a struggle to defend production land and communities together with landless peasants who had established a settlement to build a community and engage in production on land earmarked for agricultural land reform in Surat Thani Province. In the case of this particular plot of land, the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) itself had filed a case to evict Jiew Gang Jui Pattana Ltd. from the area, and the Supreme Court had made a ruling against the company on 22 May 2014, according to which it had to remove all its assets and associates from the contested area. However, the ALRO took advantage of the situation by claiming that the villagers were associates of the company and posting an eviction notice forcing them to leave the area too, even though the peasants who had established a settlement in Khlong Sai Community in actuality were in no way related to the company.

From the time of Mr. Chai's murder until today, no progress has been made in resolving the case, and Khong Sai Community is still facing the threat of eviction. This situation reflects the failure of the state to protect community rights defenders and the failure of the ALRO to allocate production land to peasants. At the same time, the community has requested land rights in the form of community land title. Most importantly, members of Khlong Sai Community have proven their intent and resolve by establishing a settlement and building a community, engaging in production, and living in the community continuously. Aside from having to struggle with influential persons, the landless peasants have also had to struggle with the state, which is unfairly using policy and legal instruments to evict the peasants from their community and production land.

Four Regions Slum Network (FRSN), which coordinates the work of the urban poor and mobilizes to struggle on issues related to land and housing rights, supports the struggle of the villagers of Khlong Sai Community and SPFT in demanding justice for landless peasants, access to production land in order to build community security, and the protection of community rights defenders. FRSN makes the following demands of the Thai government:

1. The government must express its responsibility by having the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) take over the case of Mr. Chai Boonthonglek in order to restore justice to the family and community of Mr. Chai.

2. The government must not undertake any measures to implement the eviction of the villagers from Khlong Sai Community. Moreover, it must also order the ALRO to grant land rights to Khlong Sai Community, in accordance with the request for communal land rights submitted by SPFT.

As important forces that can follow up on, investigate, and express concern to the government regarding human rights violations and injustice, FRSN calls on the mass media and human rights organizations to monitor government measures used to evict the peasants of Khlong Sai Community. FRSN hopes this monitoring will be able to protect community rights defenders and prevent the community from being evicted.

In solidarity,

Four Regions Slum Network