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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
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**PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:  
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

**Written statement\* submitted by the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC),  
a non-governmental organisation in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is  
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 February 2006]

\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the  
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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**PERSISTENT AND UNRESTRAINED ATTACKS ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS  
AND SOCIAL ACTIVISTS IN THAILAND**

1. In a series of written statements to the sixty-first session of the Commission, the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) raised concerns over impunity in Thailand and its effects on the country in terms of gross human rights abuses and attacks on human rights defenders there (E/CN.4/2005/NGO/34, 44, 62, 112). The ALRC also in March 2005 submitted a 98-page report to the Human Rights Committee speaking to the same concerns, in advance of the Committee's assessment of Thailand's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

2. In its concluding observations of July 2005 (CCPR/CO/84/THA), the Committee pointed to some key areas for the Government of Thailand to address in order for the national human rights situation to be improved. These included the prevailing culture of impunity enjoyed by the country's security forces and its consequences in terms of increased attacks on human rights defenders and the media, among others.

3. In paragraph 19 the Committee wrote that

"While welcoming the aspiration of the State party to accept and foster a vibrant civil society, including many human rights organisations, the Committee is nevertheless concerned at the number of incidents against human rights defenders and community leaders, including intimidation and verbal and physical attacks, enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings (arts. 19, 21 and 22). The State party must take measures to immediately halt and protect against the harassment and attacks against human rights defenders and community leaders. The State party must systematically investigate all reported instances of intimidation, harassment and attacks and guarantee effective remedies to victims and their families."

4. Human rights defenders, environmentalists and social reformers in Thailand continue to face death threats for their work. These are not idle threats. Lawyer Somchai Neelaphaijit was warned repeatedly that he was in danger prior to his abduction in 2004. A year after environmentalist Charoen Wat-aksorn was gunned down in 2004, Buddhist monk Phra Supoj Suwajano was murdered in June apparently due to a conflict over forest land with influential figures in Chiang Mai. Shortly after, the house of a key witness—who had complained of police harassment—was burned to the ground. All these cases have been taken up by the Department of Special Investigation, and yet in none has it shown any evidence of its work: Somchai's final whereabouts are a mystery; Charoen's killer has denied links with the alleged mastermind; and the investigation in Phra Supoj's case has turned up nothing, with the local police reportedly having succeeded in destroying any evidence and intimidating any witnesses who may have led to the killers.

5. In August 2005 the ALRC heard of a grenade attack on the car of Wiwat Thamee, who is challenging corrupt local authorities in the north of Thailand. The incident was far from remarkable in Thailand. The only real difference was that Wiwat is one of the few human rights defenders in the country who believed that it is better to speak out and risk a confrontation with the perpetrators rather than remain silent in the face of intimidation. The ALRC is aware that most human rights defenders in Thailand behave differently, keeping quiet about the daily intimidation that they experience—by way of threatening or obscene telephone calls, being followed or approached on the street by unknown persons, being followed by unknown cars, or having their photographs taken by unknown persons while meeting victims, just to name a few specific examples. Hence the number of reported threats and attacks on rights defenders and social activists in Thailand remains a tiny fraction of the actual level of daily harassment and intimidation that goes on in the country.

6. The fear of being harmed or murdered as a result of defending human rights in Thailand is very real. This situation must be changed. Attacks and threats against human rights defenders must be

accompanied by outrage. All cases must be treated seriously and responded to with vigour, by the persons who are targetted, by the concerned agencies of the Government of Thailand, and by the Commission, through its special procedures and other available avenues. Only when all cases of such threats and attacks are documented and made public will the culture of impunity that at present envelops the country be broken. The Asian Legal Resource Centre strongly endorses the recommendation of the Human Rights Committee in this regard, and trusts that the Commission will do the same.

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