



February 4, 2009

Prime Minister
Abhisit Vejjajiva
Government House
Bangkok, Thailand
Fax: +66(0)29727751

Your Excellency:

I write to you on behalf of more than 15,000 U.S. and international members of the American Political Science Association, the scholarly association which represents professors and students of political science. A number of our membership includes faculty and students at Chulalongkorn University.

It was with extreme concern and disappointment that we have read in press reports in Reuters, Reporters Without Borders, and The Economist, and notices by Amnesty International, Scholars at Risk and the Network for Education and Academic Rights that Associate Professor Giles Ji Ungpakorn of the Political Science Faculty of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok is facing charges of “lese majeste” for comments made in his book, “A Coup for the Rich,” an academic analysis of the recent political crises in Thailand. It is our understanding that if found guilty, he faces a mandatory prison sentence of 1-15 years. We are concerned about the effect on this one scholar and for the implications on a broader international academic community

For years the international academic community has regarded your country’s oldest academic institution, Chulalongkorn University, as a leading institution which attracts top students from around Thailand. From the vantage point of the American Political Science Association, political scientists inherently have an interest in issues of governance, transfers of power and political transitions which would seem to make Dr. Ji Ungpakorn’s detention an issue of academic freedom. His detention appears to be in violation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Your Excellency, we live in a world where the resolution of political differences is increasingly pursued through violence. We earnestly hope that your government would be at the forefront of illustrating that issues are capable of being resolved by a peaceful expression and exchange of differences. There is a level of transparency in today’s world by which governments are inevitably held to account in the court of public opinion.

Networking a World of Scholars

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We hope that the detention of Dr. Ji Ungpakorn is not a case of his being held solely for the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression. If this is the case, we urge that the government of Thailand examine Professor Ungpakorn's case and drop all lese majeste charges.

Sincerely,

Dr. Peter J. Katzenstein
Walter S. Carpenter, Jr. Professor of International Studies
Cornell University
President, American Political Science Association

Cc: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Thailand to the United States of America
Krit Garnjana
Royal Thai Embassy
1024 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007
Fax: 202-944-3611

Scholars at Risk
c/o New York University
194 Mercer Street, Room 410
New York, New York 10012
Fax: 212-998-2215

Network for Education and Academic Rights
90 London Road
London SE1 6LN
United Kingdom
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7021 0881

American Association for the Advancement of Science
Human Rights Coalition
1200 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20005