



Committee to Protect Journalists PROTEST LETTER 2008

Thai journalist jailed without charge in Vietnam

January 11, 2008

President Nguyen Minh Triet
Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Office of the State
1 Bach Thao
Hanoi, Vietnam

Via facsimile: +84 4 823-1872

Dear President Nguyen:

The Committee to Protect Journalists is gravely concerned about the November 17 arrest and continued imprisonment of Somsak Khunmi, a long-time news assistant with the Japan- and U.S.-based Chan Troi Moi (Radio New Horizon) radio program.

Somsak, a Thai citizen, was jailed along with Chan Troi Moi journalist Nguyen Thi Thanh Van and a group of political activists associated with the exile-run Viet Tan pro-democracy party. Before their arrests, Thanh Van and Somsak worked together reporting on a protest held in Ho Chi Minh City by aggrieved farmers who had been pushed off their land by state authorities. Nguyen was released on December 12, after the intercession of the French Embassy in Hanoi and an international outcry of protest.

Both journalists were apprehended by security officials at a private residence and taken to Ho Chi Minh City's main detention facility at 1 Nguyen Van Cu Road, where the 58-year-old Somsak is still being held. Thanh Van, a French national, was accused in the state media of terrorism and released from prison after serving 25 days in detention. CPJ met with her in Bangkok to discuss Somsak's condition.

Despite detaining Somsak for nearly two months and running photographs of his interrogation sessions in the state media, your government has failed to lodge any formal, evidence-based charges against him. It is our understanding that he is being held under Article 84 of Vietnam's Penal Code, which allows for a four-month detention period of suspects without charge.

Your administration has also inexplicably restricted access to Somsak, allowing Thailand consular staff only one visit over the 55 days he has served so far in detention. In a December 12 letter addressed to Somsak's wife, Janta Kantinat, Thailand's Foreign Ministry wrote that he suffers from severe back pain and is walking with a limp due to the lack of proper seating in his jail cell.

Prison officials acknowledged Somsak's health complications when they allowed him a hospital visit for medical treatment on December 4, according to the Thai Foreign

E-MAIL THIS
ARTICLE

READ MORE
ABOUT THIS
COUNTRY

GET INVOLVED

ABOUT CPJ

CONTACT US

Ministry letter. Since his arrest, his wife has suffered from severe depression, a condition that has required her to seek out psychiatric treatment. She plans to travel to Vietnam later this month to visit her husband, and we would strongly encourage your government to extend her normal visitation rights.

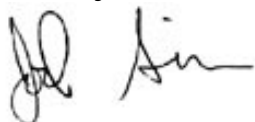
Article 69 of your country's constitution broadly protects press freedom and freedom of expression. In practice, however, successive Communist Party-led administrations have applied criminal and national security laws to arbitrarily stifle these essential democratic freedoms.

Not only does the imprisonment of Somsak raise disturbing questions about your government's commitment to upholding the national constitution, but the broader crackdown now under way on freedom of expression in Vietnam greatly undermines your government's reform credentials in the wider world. Regrettably, the repression comes at a time when your country has achieved prominence on the world stage, both with last year's accession to the World Trade Organization and this year's assumption of a temporary seat on the United Nations' Security Council.

CPJ therefore calls upon you to immediately and unconditionally release Somsak Khunmi from prison and suggests that your administration works with a commitment and vigor similar to its widely lauded and successful economic reform program to promote and protect—rather than undermine—the basic democratic principles of press freedom and freedom of expression.

Thank you for your attention. We anticipate your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel Simon', written in a cursive style.

Joel Simon
Executive Director

Join CPJ in protesting this attack on the press. Write or fax to the address above.