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Asia - Thailand

Lèse-majesté

American netizen jailed in latest abuse of Thai lèse-majesté laws

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Reporters Without Borders is shocked by the two-and-a-half-year sentence imposed on American blogger **Joe Gordon** by a Bangkok court today for insulting the Thai royal family and deplores the increase in so-called lèse-majesté crimes in Thailand.

"Although it means a reduction in his original penalty, we are shocked by this sentence, the latest in a long series of lèse-majesté convictions," the press freedom organization said.

"We are witnessing a game of one-upmanship in the penalties imposed on Thai netizens. Since it took office, the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra has shown itself to be worse than its predecessor. In just four months, the number of allegations, prosecutions and convictions on lèse-majesté grounds is higher than for the whole of last year.

"The government must put an end to this repressive policy and repeal the lèse-majesté law and the Computer Crime Act, two anti-freedom pieces of legislation.

"We call on the authorities to release Joe Gordon and the many other netizens and journalists imprisoned for lèse-majesté and to call a halt to the prosecution of the director of the online newspaper *Prachatai*, **Chiranuch Premchaiporn**, better known by the online name **Jiew**, whose trial is still in progress."

Gordon, a Thai-born American, was arrested and remanded in custody in May this year while he was on holiday in Thailand. He was officially charged on 30 August with lèse-majesté for translating excerpts of the banned biography of King Bhumibol Adulyadej by Paul Handley, "The King Never Smiles", on his blog.

He was originally sentenced to five years' imprisonment on 10 October. At first he denied all the charges but later changed his plea to guilty and his sentence was reduced. His lawyer, Anon Nampha, said his client would not appeal but hoped for a royal pardon.

Thailand's lèse-majesté law is among the most restrictive legislation in the world as far as freedom of express and freedom of information are concerned. However, Prime Minister Yingluck announced after her election victory on 3 July that it should not be used inappropriately.

In a contradictory statement on 26 August, Deputy Prime Minister Chalerm Yubamrung said he was making the crime of lèse-majesté a priority. At the same time, there has been an increase in arrests and convictions.

Ampon Tangnoppakul, known as "Uncle SMS", received a 20-year prison sentence on 23 November for sending text messages deemed to have insulted the monarchy. His case has now attracted international attention. The United States among others has expressed concern, saying such prosecutions violate the fundamental right to free expression.

Chiranuch faces a possible sentence of 20 years in prison under the Computer Crime Act for posting comments that were "damaging to the monarchy" on her blog last year ([read the press release](#)).

Somyos Prueksakasemsuk, former editor of the magazine *Voice of Thaksin* which was closed last year, has been held on remand for seven months for insulting the monarchy ([read the press release](#)).

Several netizens are still in prison for lèse-majesté offences. **Surapak Phuchaisaeng** is still awaiting a verdict in his prosecution for messages he posted on Facebook. **Thanthawut Thaweewarodomkul** was [sentenced](#) on 15 March to 13 years in prison for articles he published on a website linked to the "Red Shirts" anti-government protesters, [NorporchorUSA](#). The student blogger **Norawase Yotpiyasathien** was [arrested](#) on 5 August.

Thailand is listed as a "[country under surveillance](#)" in the Reporters Without Borders report on "Enemies of the Internet" and is [ranked 153rd](#) out of 178 countries in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.
