

21 March 2017

Thailand: Extrajudicial killing of minority rights defender and youth activist Chaiyaphum Pasae

On 17 March 2017, **Chaiyaphum Pasae**, a Lahu youth activist was shot dead by military officials who were attempting to arrest him as an alleged drug suspect in Chiang Dao district of Thailand's northern Chiang Mai province. He and a friend were driving to Chiang Mai City when soldiers stopped their car at a checkpoint and arrested them for alleged drug possession. Officials claim Chaiyaphum Pasae resisted arrest and was subsequently shot in "an act of self-defence".

[Chaiyaphum Pasae](#) was a 17-year-old ethnic Lahu human rights defender and a strong advocate for the rights of vulnerable ethnic minorities in Northern Thailand. Working with the **Young Seedlings Network Camp** in Chiang Dao, he was an advocate for the right to Thai nationality for his community through non-violent action. Chaiyaphum Pasae participated in many events to publicise the problems of ethnic minorities and he used his talent in music and film-making to promote their rights to gain citizenship, health care, and access to education. On 15 March 2017, he was among 19 youth representatives of ethnic minorities who attended a youth activist forum organised by the National Institute for Child and Family Development in Bangkok. Chaiyaphum Pasae also spoke out against abuses by Thai security forces against his community during anti-drug operations. According to his relatives, he had campaigned against drug-use since his childhood.

On 17 March 2017, Chaiyaphum Pasae and his roommate Pongsanai Saengtala were travelling to Chiang Mai City after attending music events at their school in Chiang Dao when they were stopped at a checkpoint by soldiers from the army's 5th Cavalry Regiment Task Force and the Pha Muang Task Force. The car was being driven by Pongsanai Saengtala. According to the account of the officials at the checkpoint, 2,800 methamphetamine pills were found hidden in the car's air filter. The two young men stepped out of the car and, an alleged argument took place between them and the military officials. The soldiers claimed Chaiyaphum Pasae attempted to flee and pulled a knife out of the car's trunk, adding that he also fought to evade arrest. In the purported melee, the soldiers said they shot Chaiyaphum Pasae in self-defence as he attempted to throw a hand grenade at them. The only civilian witness of the event is Pongsanai Saengtala, the driver of the car, who is now detained by the police. He was taken to Chiang Mai Prison for remand as the court approved custody. On 21 March 2017, the soldier responsible for killing Chaiyaphum Pa-sae turned himself in to the police and was charged with murder.

Human rights defenders in Thailand face threats, physical assaults, arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, and extrajudicial killings. The human rights defenders operating in Northern Thailand, particularly those working on minority rights, report threats and harassment from the military. According to Human Rights Watch, abusive officials have long used anti-drug operations to cover their attacks on activists who exposed official wrongdoing or defended minority rights.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the killing of Chaiyaphum Pasae, which it believes was solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful activities in the defence of human rights in Thailand.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Thailand to:

1. Strongly condemn the killing of human rights defender Chaiyaphum Pasae;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of human rights defender Chaiyaphum Pasae, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures, in consultation with the defenders, to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of human rights defenders working in Thailand;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Thailand are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.