

SCHOLARS AT RISK

N E T W O R K

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva
Government House
Bangkok, Thailand
Copy sent via fax to: +66 (0) 29727751

February 12, 2009

Re: Professor Giles Ji Ungpakorn

Your Excellency:

I am writing on behalf of the Scholars at Risk Network to express concern about the case of Professor Giles Ji Ungpakorn of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok who was recently charged under Thailand's lèse majesté law.

Scholars at Risk is an international network of universities and colleges dedicated to promoting academic freedom and to defending the human rights of scholars worldwide. Scholars at Risk occasionally invites interventions on behalf of scholars suffering serious threats to their academic freedom or the exercise of their fundamental human rights including, as in this case, the freedom of expression, guaranteed under Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Thailand is a State Party.

Professor Ungpakorn is an associate professor in the Political Science faculty at Chulalongkorn University and an established political commentator on Thai politics. We understand that he was charged on January 20, 2009, under Thailand's lèse majesté law for publishing in his 2007 book, *A Coup for the Rich*, paragraphs that criticize the military coup of September 19, 2006 that deposed Thaksin Shinawatra, then prime minister. Professor Ungpakorn wrote and published *A Coup for the Rich* in his role as political scientist; transfers of power and political transitions are common topics of study and debate in his field. According to reports, we understand that the charges stem from eight paragraphs in the first chapter. The Chulalongkorn University bookstore reportedly brought the book to the police's attention by lodging an official complaint, claiming that the book insulted the monarchy. The bookstore proceeded to remove the book from its shelves.

Professor Ungpakorn was scheduled to present himself to the Bangkok police on February 9, 2009, but fled to the United Kingdom instead, expressing concerns that he would not receive a fair trial in Thailand. (Professor Ungpakorn holds dual British and Thai citizenship.)

We are concerned about the charges pending against Professor Ungpakorn, both for the effect on this one scholar and for implications on the wider academic community. The case appears to involve retaliation against one scholar's peaceful conduct of academic research and publication, presumably to deter others from commenting critically on Thailand's political system.

Scholars at Risk therefore joins with national and international academic associations, scholarly societies, human rights organizations and individual scholars that respectfully urge you to re-examine Professor Ungpakorn's case and to drop all charges stemming from the publication of his book. We respectfully remind you that academic freedom is essential to achieving international cooperation and intellectual excellence, and we urge you to realize that the use of lèse majesté laws in ways that impose upon academic freedom hinder cooperation and excellence to the detriment of all Thai scholars, Thai universities and the global scholarly community.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Quinn
Director

CC:

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