

# SCHOLARS AT RISK

N E T W O R K

My name is Tyrell Haberkorn and I am presenting on behalf of Scholars at Risk, or SAR. I am a volunteer with SAR and Professor of Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. SAR works to protect threatened scholars, students, and other members of higher education communities around the world, and to advance the human rights that the higher education space needs to function – rights including academic freedom, the right to education, and freedom of assembly.

In SAR's UPR submission, we noted that rather than redressing the grave situation of academic freedom and other endemic rights violations noted during the previous UPR cycle in 2016, Thai authorities had increased pressures against scholars and students. Since the inception of sustained protests for democracy in July 2020 in Thailand, student activists and student-led organizations, such as the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration and Free Youth, have been at the forefront of calling for new elections, a new constitution, and reform of the monarchy. They simultaneously call for universities to allow critical thinking and cease censorship of students. In response, they face legal consequences of arrest, detention, and prosecution, accompanied by sustained harassment intended to create a climate of fear to stop others from joining them.

In the four months since SAR's UPR submission, the number of students facing prosecution for peaceful expression and the number of cases each face have continued to rise. Of particularly grave concern is the case of Parit Chiwarak, a student activist facing at least 20 lèse majesté accusations, who is once again being held without bail prior to trial.

Universities exist within, not outside, society. SAR wishes to emphasize that protecting student expression and protest-- which comes from their experience as both students in classrooms who face lack of protection for freedom of thought and citizens in the streets who face suppression of their civil rights – is an essential aspect of protecting academic freedom specifically and human rights broadly.

Scholars at Risk calls on the Thai government to immediately take action to protect academic freedom and decriminalize peaceful expression in line with the country's domestic and international human rights obligations. First, repeal Article 112, the lèse majesté law, and release and drop all charges against student activists and others facing prosecution. Second, revise Article 116, the sedition law, to bring it in line with the ICCPR. Third, draft and pass law to substantively protect academic freedom, mentioned in the 2017 Constitution. Fourth, cease targeting student activists. Finally, allow relevant UN Special Rapporteurs to visit Thailand and report on the human rights situation.