

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S ROLE IN HANDLING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CASES IN THE THAI MILITARY JUNTA REGIME 2014-2023

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Abstract: *The 2014 military coup in Thailand, led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha, established the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), which ruled the country with authoritarian control for nearly a decade. This era was marked by serious human rights violations, including torture, enforced disappearances, suppression of free expression, and the rejection of asylum for Rohingya refugees—violations of Articles 3, 5, 9, 14, and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This study explores the role of Amnesty International in addressing these abuses through Clive Archer's theory, which views international organizations as instruments, arenas, and actors. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method and literature review, the research finds that Amnesty International actively documented violations, initiated global campaigns, and facilitated international advocacy. While the organization contributed significantly to raising international awareness and mobilizing diplomatic pressure, its influence on Thai domestic policy remains limited due to entrenched political resistance. Nonetheless, Amnesty's actions were crucial in preserving discourse on human rights and empowering civil society. It serves as a vital transnational actor whose role, although constrained, remains symbolically and normatively important in the struggle for human rights in authoritarian contexts*

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Thailand experienced a significant political upheaval when General Prayuth Chan-ocha led a military coup that ousted the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. The coup was primarily triggered by political unrest, allegations of corruption, and dissatisfaction with proposed amnesty laws that were believed to benefit former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

As a result of the coup, a military junta known as the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) was established, which marked the beginning of nearly a decade of authoritarian rule characterized by the suspension of democratic institutions and

fundamental freedoms (Satrusayang, 2021).

During the NCPO's rule, Thailand witnessed a series of grave human rights violations. These included arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, suppression of freedom of expression, and restrictions on peaceful assembly. Reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch consistently documented the Thai military's repressive tactics. For instance, activist Kritsuda Khunasen was detained without charge in a military facility, subjected to torture, and coerced into signing documents during her arbitrary detention (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Such actions directly contravene Articles 3 and 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which guarantee the right to life, liberty, and freedom from arbitrary arrest.

Conditions in Thai prisons under junta rule were also deplorable, with severe overcrowding reported. Amnesty International highlighted that many inmates had to sleep in cells far below the space standards set by government regulations, often with just one toilet shared by dozens of prisoners (Amnesty International, 2014). These conditions are considered degrading treatment under Article 5 of the UDHR, which prohibits cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (United Nations, 1948).

In addition, the junta frequently invoked laws such as Article 44 of the interim constitution and the Computer Crime Act to censor dissent and prosecute peaceful protesters and social media users. The arrests of individuals such as Sombat Boonngamanong, who used Facebook to mobilize opposition, illustrate the regime's attempt to silence free speech and political criticism. These actions violate Article 19 of the UDHR, which protects freedom of opinion and expression (Lefevre, 2014).

The junta also failed to honor Thailand's international obligations regarding asylum and refugee protection. One notable case is the systematic rejection of asylum requests from Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Myanmar. Instead of providing sanctuary, Thai authorities reportedly towed boats back to sea and detained refugees indefinitely in inhumane conditions, violating Article 14 of the UDHR, which grants the right to seek asylum from persecution (Amnesty International, 2017).

Faced with growing international concern, various actors, including the United Nations and ASEAN, called for the restoration of democratic governance and respect for human rights in Thailand. ASEAN, while traditionally non-interventionist, issued a statement reaffirming its commitment to a peaceful and democratic solution (ASEAN, 2014).

Amnesty International emerged as a critical actor during this period. As a non-governmental organization focused on human rights, Amnesty played multiple roles—investigating abuses, advocating for victims, and mobilizing international attention. Amnesty's 2015 report, "Attitude Adjustment," and numerous urgent actions exemplify its commitment to uncovering and addressing the systemic human rights violations perpetrated by the Thai junta. Amnesty International utilized its international platform to lobby states, submit documentation to UN human rights mechanisms, and empower local actors (Amnesty International, 2015).

Through a multidimensional approach grounded in Clive Archer's theory of international organizations—as instruments, arenas, and actors—Amnesty International not only provided credible documentation but also served as a platform for coalition building and operated independently in calling for justice and accountability. In a region

often plagued by authoritarian backlash, Amnesty's presence in Thailand underscored the vital role of transnational advocacy networks in defending human rights where domestic avenues for redress are systematically obstructed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Amnesty International's role in addressing human rights violations under Thailand's military junta (2014–2023) requires a theoretical foundation that incorporates perspectives from international relations, particularly regarding international organizations (IOs), and international human rights law. This section outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the research, focusing on Clive Archer's theory of international organizations and the normative structure of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

International Organizations in Clive Archer's Theory

Clive Archer (2001) conceptualizes international organizations through a tripartite framework, identifying them as instruments, arenas, and actors. These roles are not mutually exclusive and may be exercised simultaneously or sequentially depending on the organization's capacity, autonomy, and interaction with states or non-state actors.

As an instrument, an IO is used by states or other actors to achieve specific political, economic, or strategic objectives. In this sense, IOs are tools or channels through which power or influence is projected, often shaped by the preferences of dominant member states (Archer, 2001). Although Amnesty International is not a state-created IO, it performs instrument-like functions by disseminating data and advocacy materials that other actors (e.g., the UN, EU, or civil society groups) use in policymaking or diplomatic interventions. For example, Amnesty's urgent actions and periodic human rights reports are regularly cited by UN special rapporteurs and international tribunals (Amnesty International, 2015).

As an arena, an IO provides a neutral platform for dialogue, negotiation, and multilateral coordination. While this role is most commonly attributed to intergovernmental organizations like the UN or ASEAN, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Amnesty also create discursive spaces for participation and advocacy. Amnesty organizes campaigns such as Write for Rights and stakeholder submissions during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council, serving as a space where victims, activists, and experts come together (Amnesty International, 2018).

Finally, as an actor, an IO possesses autonomy and the capacity to develop its own preferences and agendas. Archer argues that international actors can independently influence global politics, especially when they maintain credibility and public legitimacy (Archer, 2001). Amnesty International, through its Southeast Asia Regional Office and global advocacy efforts, exemplifies this role. It issues statements, conducts independent investigations, and holds press conferences criticizing Thailand's *lèse majesté* laws and suppression of peaceful protests—actions that indicate a high degree of institutional agency (Amnesty International, 2020).

This threefold theoretical model allows for a more comprehensive analysis of Amnesty's position: it is not merely a passive watchdog but a dynamic agent that mobilizes international pressure and shapes the global discourse on human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a Normative Framework

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, is a foundational document that outlines universal and inalienable rights to which all human beings are entitled. While not legally binding, the UDHR has gained the status of customary international law and is widely cited in human rights advocacy, legal rulings, and international treaties (United Nations, 1948).

In the context of Thailand under military rule, several articles of the UDHR are particularly relevant. Article 3, which guarantees the right to life, liberty, and personal security, was frequently violated through enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions. Activists such as Kritsuda Khunasen were detained incommunicado and later testified to experiences of torture, underscoring violations of Article 5, which prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Article 9 prohibits arbitrary arrest or detention, a norm regularly flouted by the NCPO regime through pretrial military detentions under martial law and Section 44 of the interim constitution. Amnesty International documented more than 400 politically motivated detentions from 2014 to 2016 (Amnesty International, 2016).

The junta's curtailment of free expression and peaceful protest further infringed on Article 19, which affirms the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Thailand's Cybersecurity Act and the 2015 amendments to the Computer Crimes Act were routinely used to prosecute critics and censor online dissent (Lefevre, 2014).

Lastly, the rejection of asylum to Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar constitutes a breach of Article 14, which affirms the right to seek asylum from persecution. Amnesty's 2015 urgent action report condemned Thailand for turning back boats and detaining asylum seekers indefinitely in substandard facilities (Amnesty International, 2015).

The UDHR serves not only as a legal benchmark but also as a normative tool that organizations like Amnesty International employ to assess compliance and advocate for reforms. Its universality legitimizes Amnesty's criticism of Thai state practices and justifies transnational pressure for human rights accountability.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses qualitative data analysis techniques, which are the process of systematically searching for and compiling data obtained from the results of literature studies or field notes, and documentation, by organizing data into categories, describing them into units, compiling them into patterns, choosing what is important and what will be studied, and making conclusions so that they are easy to understand by oneself and others (Hardani et al, 2020).

This research employs a qualitative descriptive research design, which is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena, particularly in political and legal contexts where human rights issues intersect with state power. The aim of this methodology is not to quantify data but to interpret patterns, meanings, and underlying mechanisms behind Amnesty International's actions and the human rights abuses during the Thai junta era.

The research uses library research as the main technique for data collection. This involves reviewing and analyzing a wide range of secondary sources (Sugiyono, 2016),

including reports published by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, United Nations bodies, journal articles, books, and relevant legal documents. Among the key documents used are Amnesty International's 100 Days under Martial Law (2014), Attitude Adjustment (2015), and its submissions to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the Universal Periodic Review. These documents provide factual evidence of human rights abuses and the strategies adopted by Amnesty in response.

In terms of analytical framework, the study adopts the interactive model of qualitative data analysis developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. This model involves three interrelated stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Through this approach, the researcher identifies patterns of behavior, extracts significant themes, and interprets the meanings of Amnesty International's interventions within the Thai context.

The unit of analysis in this research includes human rights violations committed under the administration of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the policy responses of the Thai government, and Amnesty International's roles as actor, instrument, and arena. The research timeframe spans from 2014 to 2023 to capture a comprehensive overview of the junta's rise and decline.

This methodological framework enables the study to present a holistic narrative, grounded in verifiable sources, that explains the intersection between international human rights advocacy and authoritarian state practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Thai Military Junta Regime (2014-2023)

Thailand has experienced a series of military coups throughout its modern history, including the significant ones in 2006 and 2014. The 2006 coup, led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin and interim Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont, overthrew Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and immediately imposed martial law, suspended the constitution, and severely restricted civil liberties such as press freedom and public assembly (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

The 2014 coup followed a similar trajectory. On May 22, 2014, General Prayuth Chan-ocha led a military junta to overthrow the democratically elected government. Following the coup, the junta immediately dissolved the 2007 constitution and established the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). Under this regime, civil and political rights were curtailed, including the freedom of expression, assembly, and association. The junta also engaged in arbitrary detentions of its political opponents and critics (Amnesty International, 2015).

Under NCPO rule, the military consolidated power by appointing Prayuth Chan-ocha as the official Prime Minister in August 2014. The junta governed through absolute executive authority without legislative or judicial oversight. Military courts were used to try civilians, and numerous activists were prosecuted for peaceful protests, a clear suppression of fundamental rights (Amnesty International, 2015).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Prayuth's government imposed a State of Emergency starting March 26, 2020, which was extended repeatedly for more than two and a half years until October 1, 2022. The decree restricted movement and public gatherings under the

pretext of public health while further stifling dissent. The government increased its surveillance and repression against youth-led pro-democracy movements. Protesters, including minors, were arrested and charged under harsh laws for peacefully expressing dissent (Amnesty International, 2022).

In August 2022, Prayuth's premiership was temporarily suspended by the Constitutional Court to assess whether he had exceeded the eight-year term limit. A legal dispute arose over whether the count should begin in 2014 or after the enactment of the 2017 constitution. On September 30, 2022, the court ruled that Prayuth's term should be counted from the 2017 constitution, allowing him to remain in power until the 2023 elections (Al Jazeera, 2022).

The general elections held on May 14, 2023, saw the Move Forward Party (MFP) and Pheu Thai Party win the majority in the House of Representatives. This result reflected public dissatisfaction, especially among the youth, toward nearly a decade of military rule. However, despite their electoral success, MFP was blocked from forming a government due to constitutional mechanisms favoring military-appointed senators (Tharoor, 2023).

Prayuth's own party, the United Thai Nation, won only 36 out of 500 seats. On July 11, 2023, Prayuth formally announced his retirement from politics and stepped down from party leadership. He remained as caretaker Prime Minister until a new cabinet was appointed (Tharoor, 2023).

In summary, the regime under Prayuth Chan-ocha represented a prolonged phase of authoritarian rule in Thailand. The junta's consolidation of power was marked by the systematic erosion of democratic institutions and fundamental rights. From martial law and constitution suspension to emergency decrees and prosecution of dissenters, the NCPO era imposed significant constraints on civil liberties.

Human Rights Violations During the Thai Military Junta Regime 2014-2023

The military junta government in Thailand under General Prayuth Chan-ocha, which ruled the country from 2014 until 2023, represents a critical period in the erosion of democratic rights and civil liberties. The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), formed after the 2014 coup, not only suspended democratic institutions but also implemented laws and policies that led to widespread and recurring human rights violations. These actions violated various principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and were widely condemned by international human rights bodies, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Torture and Extrajudicial Killing: The Case of Chaiphum Pasae (Article 5 UDHR)

Among the most heinous violations was the case of Chaiphum Pasae, a 17-year-old Lahu activist who was killed by military officers at a checkpoint in Chiang Mai in 2017. The military claimed he attempted to flee during a drug search, prompting an officer to shoot him in self-defense. However, eyewitnesses and civil society organizations reported signs of torture prior to his death and alleged that the military manipulated the narrative by refusing to release the CCTV footage. The case represents a serious violation of Article 5 UDHR, which prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Prachathai, 2022, 2023, 2024).

Rejection of Rohingya Asylum Seekers (Articles 3, 8, and 14 UDHR)

Thailand's response to the humanitarian crisis faced by Rohingya refugees reflected an

institutional disregard for basic human rights. On multiple occasions, Thai naval forces pushed boats of Rohingya asylum seekers back into the open sea or confined them in poor detention conditions, denying them access to legal protection and humanitarian relief. These actions contravened Article 3 (right to life and security), Article 8 (right to effective legal remedy), and Article 14 (right to seek asylum) of the UDHR. Reports documented how refugees were detained indefinitely without trial or were left adrift at sea, vulnerable to trafficking and abuse (Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Arbitrary Detention: The Case of Pravit Rojanaphruk (Article 9 UDHR)

The Thai junta employed detention without trial as a key tactic to silence journalists and political critics. Pravit Rojanaphruk, a prominent journalist, was detained twice in military camps for his political views and subjected to “attitude adjustment.” He later faced sedition charges and was banned from traveling to international conferences, including a UNESCO event. This form of intimidation and state-imposed restriction on movement and expression clearly violated Article 9 UDHR, which protects individuals from arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2017; iLaw, 2018).

Political Arrests: The Case of Chaturon Chaisang (Article 9 UDHR)

Chaturon Chaisang, a former education minister, was arrested during a live press briefing in 2014 after defying the NCPO’s order to report. He became the first civilian to be tried in a military court under the junta, raising serious concerns regarding civilian access to justice and the rule of law. His case demonstrates how political opposition was criminalized and how military courts were misused to suppress dissenting voices, in violation of Article 9 UDHR (CBC, 2014).

Unfair Trials and Political Prosecution: The Case of Arnon Nampa (Article 10 UDHR)

One of the most significant legal battles under the junta regime involved Arnon Nampa, a human rights lawyer and activist. He was convicted for giving a peaceful speech that called for monarchy reform. He was tried in a closed court, denied bail, and sentenced to over 14 years in prison. These proceedings violated Article 10 UDHR, which guarantees the right to a fair and public hearing by an independent tribunal. His case symbolizes how Thailand’s lèse-majesté law became a weapon to criminalize political thought and suppress legal activism (Human Rights Watch, 2015, 2020; Lawyers for Lawyers, 2024).

Suppression of Freedom of Expression: The Case of Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit (Article 19 UDHR)

The targeting of Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the disbanded Future Forward Party, highlights the junta’s restriction on political speech. He faced lèse-majesté charges for criticizing Thailand’s vaccine policy and was barred from parliament after the Constitutional Court dissolved his party. These actions were widely criticized as politically motivated and contravened Article 19 UDHR, which protects the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The repression against Thanathorn was part of a larger trend of suppressing pro-democracy political leaders (Strangjo, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2019; ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, 2019).

Criminalization of Peaceful Assembly: The Case of Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul (Article 20 UDHR)

Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul, a student leader and one of the prominent voices of the 2020 pro-democracy protests, was detained multiple times for peacefully advocating

constitutional reform. Despite the nonviolent nature of her activities, she was held in pre-trial detention and subjected to judicial harassment. Her prolonged imprisonment and hunger strikes exemplify the regime's efforts to criminalize peaceful activism, violating Article 20 UDHR, which safeguards the right to peaceful assembly and association (IFHR, 2021; TLHR, 2022).

The Prayuth Chan-ocha military regime consistently undermined human rights norms through a broad range of abuses, including torture, arbitrary detention, censorship, forced disappearances, and political persecution. These cases, examined through the lens of the UDHR, demonstrate Thailand's regression from democratic standards during the junta era. Despite efforts by Amnesty International and other organizations to hold the government accountable, the regime maintained control using military, legal, and digital tools of repression. The international community and regional human rights bodies must continue to apply pressure and support civil society actors working toward democratic restoration in Thailand.

Amnesty International's Role in Handling Human Rights Violation Cases

From 2014 to 2023, Thailand experienced a resurgence of authoritarian governance under the military junta led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha. The regime curtailed civil liberties, prosecuted dissidents, and committed widespread human rights violations. Amnesty International, a globally recognized human rights organization, responded actively through advocacy, documentation, public mobilization, and international engagement. Using Clive Archer's theoretical framework, Amnesty International's involvement can be categorized into three functional roles: as an instrument, an arena, and an actor in international relations and rights-based advocacy.

Amnesty International as an Instrument

Amnesty International functioned as an instrument by producing data and analyses that were used by other actors, including the United Nations, media outlets, and human rights advocates. Its 2014 report "Attitude Adjustment: 100 Days Under Martial Law" documented violations such as arbitrary arrests, suppression of protests, media censorship, and military trials of civilians (Amnesty International, 2014). The report was cited by UNHCR through Refworld, by international NGOs, and media outlets such as Truthout and

ReliefWeb, illustrating its instrumental use by external actors to pressure the Thai government (Refworld, 2014; Haberkorn, 2014; ReliefWeb, 2014).

In the case of Chaiphum Pasae, Amnesty issued a public statement demanding an independent investigation and judicial accountability. This declaration pushed the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs to respond diplomatically, acknowledging the case and promising an investigation (Amnesty International, 2017). Similarly, in Arnon Nampa's case, Amnesty launched an Urgent Action campaign that gathered over 7,000 signatures globally and submitted a formal petition to the Thai government, requesting his unconditional release and legal reform regarding lèse-majesté laws (Amnesty International Thailand, 2024).

In response to Thailand's rejection of Rohingya asylum seekers, Amnesty released the "Refugees and Migrants Adrift Remain at Risk" campaign in 2015. The organization urged Southeast Asian governments to adhere to international obligations, including non-refoulement and safe disembarkation, positioning Amnesty as a legal and normative resource for other advocacy and diplomatic entities (Amnesty International, 2015).

Amnesty International as an Arena

As an arena, Amnesty International facilitated interaction between local civil society and international advocacy networks. In Thailand, where local voices were suppressed, Amnesty created space for activists, journalists, and political dissidents to speak globally. It amplified the stories of individuals like Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul, Pravit Rojanaphruk, and Chaturon Chaisang, allowing their narratives to reach global forums through reports, media awards, and international campaigns (Amnesty International Thailand, 2019; 2023).

Amnesty's contributions to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) processes in 2016 and 2021 are clear examples of this role. By submitting shadow reports to the United Nations, Amnesty connected local evidence of human rights violations to international legal mechanisms. The UNHRC acknowledged these submissions and issued recommendations for legal reform in Thailand (Amnesty International, 2016; 2021; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2016; 2021).

Furthermore, events such as the "Election 2023: Leaders' Speeches, Human Rights Agenda" forum provided a domestic arena for political leaders and civil society to publicly debate human rights issues. This initiative embodied Clive Archer's idea of international organizations as platforms that allow interaction, coordination, and communication among multiple stakeholders (Amnesty International Thailand, 2023).

Amnesty International as an Actor

As an actor, Amnesty International exercised autonomy in shaping the human rights discourse, influencing policy, and directly engaging with governing bodies. Unlike being used by others, this role represents proactive agency. Amnesty's fact-finding delegation in July 2014, which met directly with NCPO officials and presented documented concerns, illustrates its independent strategic intervention (Amnesty International, 2014).

In the case of Wanchalearm Satsaksit, who was abducted in Phnom Penh in 2020, Amnesty conducted a global campaign that included public statements, urgent actions, and direct appeals to both Thai and Cambodian authorities. The organization also marked the anniversary of his disappearance with online memorials and a formal visit to the Cambodian embassy by his family and Amnesty representatives (Amnesty International Thailand, 2020; Amnesty International Thailand, 2023).

In the case of Arnon Nampa, Amnesty not only submitted urgent actions but also organized global letter-writing campaigns and petition drives under its "Write for Rights" initiative. These actions emphasized Arnon's peaceful protest and free speech rights under international human rights law, directly challenging Thai legal practices (Amnesty International, 2023).

Amnesty also engaged in continuous independent reporting, as seen in its 2017/2018 Annual Report launch, which evaluated Thailand's deteriorating conditions. The press conference served as a moment of public accountability and advocacy, underlining Amnesty's proactive role in shaping narratives and mobilizing responses (Amnesty International Thailand, 2018).

Amnesty International's work in Thailand between 2014 and 2023 demonstrates its versatility as an international organization. As an instrument, it provided evidence-based advocacy tools. As an arena, it offered platforms for participation and international engagement. As an actor, it independently shaped discourse and confronted state violence.

By fulfilling these roles, Amnesty exemplifies Clive Archer's theory and reinforces the importance of INGOs in defending human rights under repressive regimes.

Impact and Obstacles of Amnesty International in Carrying Out Its Role

Between 2014 and 2023, the Thai military junta under Prayuth Chan-ocha oversaw a period of democratic regression, characterized by censorship, legal intimidation, and widespread human rights violations. Amnesty International, as a transnational human rights organization, maintained consistent advocacy throughout this period. This journal article analyzes both the impact and the challenges encountered by Amnesty International in carrying out its mission in Thailand, as presented in documented reports and campaigns from the era.

Amnesty International's role in Thailand had both symbolic and practical implications. Although it did not lead to substantial policy reforms, it significantly influenced public discourse and international perception.

For instance, in the 2016 report *Make Him Speak by Tomorrow*, Amnesty documented 74 cases of torture carried out by Thai police and military officials (Amnesty International, 2016). The Thai government responded aggressively, cancelling Amnesty's press conference and threatening the speakers with detention (Al Jazeera, 2016). This defensive reaction, while not yielding structural reform, exemplified the pressure Amnesty was able to exert through public exposure and diplomatic outreach.

Amnesty's advocacy forced the junta to issue public commitments. In mid-2018, following international criticism and internal protests, the NCPO announced plans to ease political restrictions. However, Amnesty criticized the announcement as

inadequate, stating it lacked enforceable mechanisms and sincerity (Amnesty International Thailand, 2018). This indicates that while Amnesty influenced public commitments, the actual policy change remained minimal and symbolic.

More significantly, Amnesty succeeded in raising global awareness and shifting public opinion, both locally and internationally. Through its campaigns against the use of lèse-majesté laws, such as in the case of Arnon Nampa, Amnesty amplified the conversation around monarchy reform, a once-taboo subject in Thailand. Still, despite advocacy efforts, laws protecting royal institutions and party dissolution policies continued under Prayuth's administration (Ratcliffe, 2022).

In sum, Amnesty International's strongest impacts were normative and discursive, helping to reshape public dialogue and gain space for civil society voices at forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Council. However, its direct policy influence on the Thai regime remained limited due to political resistance and entrenched military authority.

Despite its persistent advocacy, Amnesty International encountered formidable obstacles from the Thai state and segments of society. These barriers took structural, legal, and sociopolitical forms.

A major legal constraint came in the form of censorship and lawfare. In 2020, the junta issued the Emergency Decree, prohibiting news coverage of anti-government demonstrations. Broadcasting licenses for opposition-leaning media outlets were revoked, making it increasingly difficult for Amnesty's reports and statements to reach the public (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020). In 2021, the government introduced the NGO Regulation Bill, granting the state the power to investigate, dissolve, and criminally

prosecute foreign-funded organizations—posing a direct threat to Amnesty’s operational existence (Sasipornkarn, 2021).

Amnesty also faced direct repression. In 2016, their press conference on torture was shut down by Thai authorities under threat of arrest (Al Jazeera, 2016). In another instance, an Amnesty staff member was fined for speaking publicly about enforced disappearances, underlining the legal intimidation faced by the organization (Amnesty International, 2021).

Beyond legal restrictions, social-political intimidation was another challenge. Many victims and witnesses feared retaliation and opted for anonymity in Amnesty’s reports. This made documentation harder and diminished the possibility of legal accountability (Amnesty International, 2020). Additionally, in 2022, far-right nationalist and royalist groups collected millions of signatures demanding Amnesty’s expulsion from Thailand, accusing the organization of undermining national unity (Ratcliffe, 2022). This illustrates the growing polarization and hostility toward international human rights advocacy in Thailand’s nationalist discourse.

Lastly, the persistent media censorship—both through formal legislation and centralized digital surveillance—continued to limit Amnesty’s outreach. Not only were their reports blocked or discredited by pro-government outlets, but their visibility was further reduced due to social media manipulation and online attacks.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the complex and multi-dimensional role played by Amnesty International in responding to human rights violations committed by the Thai military junta between 2014 and 2023. Through the lens of Clive Archer’s theory, Amnesty emerged not only as a passive observer but as a critical international organization fulfilling the functions of an instrument, an arena, and an actor.

As an instrument, Amnesty served to amplify the voices of victims and civil society by providing documented evidence of human rights abuses. Its comprehensive reports, such as “Attitude Adjustment” and “Make Him Speak by Tomorrow,” were used by international bodies including the United Nations and civil society organizations to pressure the Thai government to adopt more rights-respecting practices. These reports were instrumental in exposing state violence and became tools for international actors to mobilize accountability efforts.

As an arena, Amnesty provided a platform for transnational dialogue and coordination. In a context where domestic civil liberties were tightly restricted, Amnesty facilitated global conversations on issues such as enforced disappearances, the misuse of lèse-majesté laws, and the treatment of Rohingya refugees. Events like the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), as well as campaigns like “Write for Rights” and public forums leading up to the 2023 election, allowed diverse actors to engage with and influence Thailand’s human rights landscape.

As an actor, Amnesty International demonstrated independent agency in influencing discourse, policy, and political behavior. Its autonomous investigations, direct engagement with the junta, and urgent action campaigns reveal a high degree of organizational independence and normative commitment. In cases such as those of Arnon Nampa and Wanchalearm Satsaksit, Amnesty not only documented the violations but also actively shaped international narratives and put pressure on state actors to act.

Despite these efforts, the organization's impact on policy change in Thailand remained limited, constrained by the junta's authoritarian control, legal harassment, public disinformation campaigns, and legislative barriers such as the 2021 NGO Regulation Bill. Amnesty's operations were repeatedly obstructed through state intimidation, legal restrictions, and political polarization, highlighting the difficult environment for transnational advocacy in authoritarian contexts.

Nonetheless, Amnesty International's persistent involvement in Thailand had significant symbolic, discursive, and normative consequences. It raised international awareness, empowered local civil society, and kept the spotlight on a regime that sought to suppress transparency and accountability. Amnesty's efforts contributed meaningfully to preserving democratic discourse and human rights principles during one of the most repressive periods in Thailand's modern history.

In conclusion, Amnesty International demonstrated the capacity of international NGOs to act as critical agents of human rights protection, even in restrictive political environments. While the direct transformation of repressive policies proved difficult, the organization's influence in shaping global perceptions, empowering domestic actors, and keeping violations in the international spotlight remains undeniable.

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HALAMAN INI SENGAJA DIKOSONGKAN