

Blog campaign launched on Thailand's national rights body

Asian Human Rights Commission

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(Hong Kong, March 4, 2008) The Asian Human Rights Commission on Tuesday launched a blog campaign to raise debate on the appointment of new members to Thailand's national human rights body. The Hong Kong-based regional rights group started the blog alarmed at a lack of public discussion about the appointing of new members to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Thailand this year.

"Right now there seems to be no talk at all about who the new commissioners will be or how they will be selected once the senate is up and running," Basil Fernando, director of the AHRC, said.

"If people in Thailand don't keep their eyes on this, then one day soon without knowing it they will end up with a bogus and politically-managed commission comprising of people who couldn't care less about human rights, like what now exists in Sri Lanka," he warned.

Thailand's senate, which is half-elected and half-appointed, has the task of revising the law on the NHRC through which new members will be selected.

According to the 2007 constitution, candidates should have "apparent knowledge and experience in the protection of the rights and liberties of the people".

"We need to get as many ideas as possible about who fits these criteria," Fernando explained.

"We hope that this blog will be a place for people to get talking about who can do this important job, and that it will promote talk elsewhere too," he said.

The AHRC plans to incorporate suggested candidates into the blog and come up with a list of seven possible new commissioners to put forward to the selection panel. It will also publish interviews with existing commissioners and other concerned persons.

"Although a national rights institution is no substitute for proper courts and criminal investigators, with good people on board it can certainly contribute to building a culture of human rights," Fernando observed.

"The current commission in Thailand has a number of good persons who have tried their best to defend human rights there in extremely difficult times," he said.

"We sincerely hope that through this blog campaign we can get some ideas going on suitable replacements and look forward to a good debate," Fernando added.

The blog is titled "Who should be the rights commission?" and it can be read at: <http://nhrc-thai.wordpress.com>.

It will be predominantly in Thai but also in English, and updated regularly.