THAILAND UPR IV
2026

THE SYSTEMATIC EROSION OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS:

"Lawfare" Structural Impunity, and the Militarization of Conscience in the PATANI Region



Joint UPR Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review

53rd Session of the UPR Working Group

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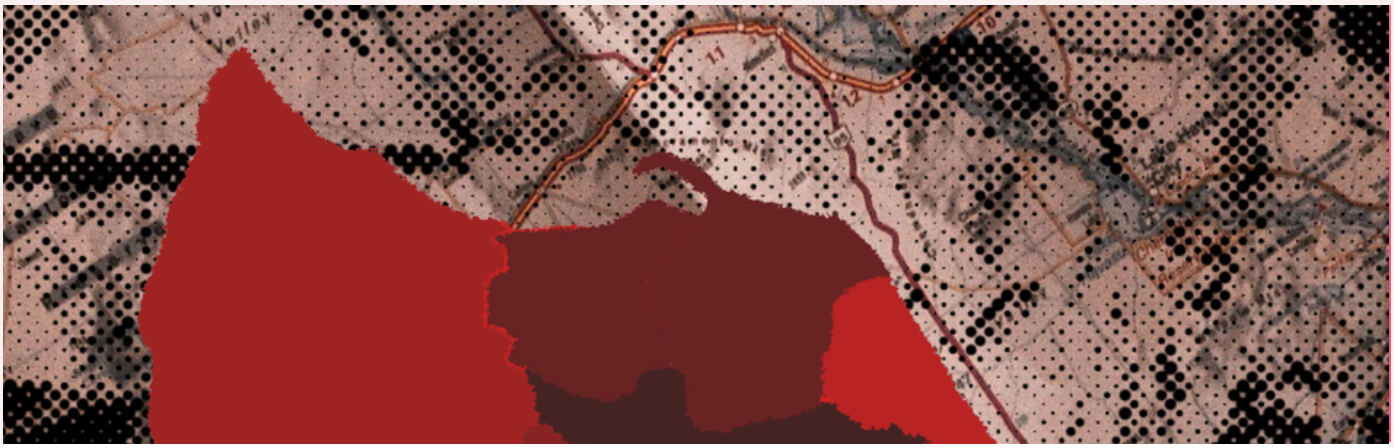

Joint UPR Submission: The Systematic Erosion of Civil and Political Rights: "Lawfare" Structural Impunity, and the Militarization of Conscience in the PATANI Region
April 2026

Submission by

The Patani Working Group for Monitoring on International Mechanisms, The Hooman, The Civil Society Assembly for Peace, Prof. Haji Sulong Abdulqadir Tohmeena Foundation, and The Thai CSOs coalition for the UPR (Universal Periodic Review) and UN Mechanisms

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CITATION

The Patani Working Group for Monitoring on International Mechanisms, The Hooman, The Civil Society Assembly for Peace, Prof. Haji Sulong Abdulqadir Tohmeena Foundation, and The Thai CSOs coalition for the UPR (Universal Periodic Review) and UN Mechanisms, (April 2026), *Joint UPR Submission: The Systematic Erosion of Civil and Political Rights: "Lawfare" Structural Impunity, and the Militarization of Conscience in the PATANI Region*, for the UN Universal Periodic Review of Thailand (4th UPR Cycle), 53rd Session of the UPR Working Group

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1. Introduction

1.1 This submission by the Patani Working Group for Monitoring on International Mechanisms, the Hooman, the Civil Society Assembly for Peace and Prof. Haji Sulonq Abdulqadir Tohmeena Foundation and the Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR, examines Thailand's compliance with its international human rights obligations in the Patani region, particularly in light of recommendations accepted during the 2nd and 3rd UPR cycles relating to freedom of expression, access to justice, accountability for past violations, and the protection of human rights defenders. Patani is not merely a geographical area encompassing Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, and parts of Songkhla provinces, but represents a distinct socio-cultural identity of the Malay Muslim population. For over two decades, the region has been governed under special security laws, creating a de facto permanent state of exception. Since 2004, three key security laws, the Martial Law Act (2004), the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations (2005), and the Internal Security Act (2008) have enabled extensive military control over civilian life.[1] Although the Emergency Decree has been partially lifted in some districts, security forces continue to exercise broad discretionary powers in practice.[2]

1.2 During the 3rd UPR cycle, Thailand received a number of recommendations relating to the protection of civil and political rights, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, access to justice, and the protection of human rights defenders. However, no recommendations specifically addressed the situation in the Patani region, reflecting a continued lack of recognition of the distinct challenges faced by the Malay Muslim population. Nevertheless, the Thai government received multiple recommendations concerning (1) the protection of civic space and fundamental freedoms, (2) accountability for human rights violations, including past incidents, (3) the prevention of arbitrary detention and misuse of laws, and (4) the protection of vulnerable groups and minorities. Thailand supported many of these recommendations. However, as this submission demonstrates, their implementation remains limited in practice, particularly in the context of the Patani region, where the use of security laws, criminal prosecutions, and restrictions on participation continue to undermine the effective enjoyment of human rights.

1.3 The submission indicates that Thailand does not have in place adequate policies that fully protect human rights and diverse identity of people in the Patani region. Moreover, due to martial law and suppression from the Thai government, people in the Patani region face difficulty in expressing their opinion and live in constant fear of the violence against muslim people. These issues will be structured as follows:

- Section 2 examines the use of lawfare and the criminalization of self-determination;
- Section 3 analyses the use of SLAPP and repression of human rights defenders;
- Section 4 addresses systemic impunity and extrajudicial practices;

- Section 5 evaluates barriers to meaningful participation in peace processes;
- Section 6 provides recommendations.

2. Lawfare and the Criminalization of Self-Determination

2.1 During previous UPR cycles, Thailand accepted recommendations to guarantee freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and public participation. However, implementation remains inadequate, particularly in the Patani region, where civic space continues to shrink. There has been a significant regression in civil and political rights, as expressions of political opinion, particularly those related to the right to self-determination are increasingly criminalized. Security agencies have used criminal law to prosecute individuals for peaceful expression, creating a climate of fear and restricting public assembly.

2.2 Under Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), all peoples have the right to self-determination.[3] Thailand's interpretative declaration limiting this right in relation to sovereignty and territorial integrity[4] must not undermine the object and purpose of the Covenant. However, in practice, this declaration has been used to justify criminal prosecutions under Articles 116 (sedition) and 210 (criminal association) of the Criminal Code against individuals exercising their civil and political rights. These practices violate Thailand's obligations under the ICCPR, particularly: Article 19 (freedom of expression) and Article 21 (peaceful assembly).[5] They also raise concerns under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)[6], as enforcement disproportionately targets Malay individuals.[7]

2.3 The use of criminal law in this context fails to meet the principles of necessity and proportionality, as required under international human rights law, and constitutes an excessive restriction in a democratic society.

2.4 **Case example: The "Referendum Case" on 7 June 2023:** an academic seminar titled *"The Right to Self-Determination and Peace in Patani"*[8] was held at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus.[9] The event aimed to explore peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, including public participation and referendums. Following the event, the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) Region 4 filed charges against five organizers and participants under Articles 116 and 210 of the Criminal Code. Notably, enforcement was selective: Malay youth and local activists were prosecuted, while external academics and national-level politicians participating in the same event were not charged. This reflects discriminatory enforcement and undue surveillance of academic spaces, undermining academic freedom.

2.5 **Case example: The "Melayu Raya Case"**: the "Melayu Raya 2022" cultural event, held on 4 May 2022 in Pattani Province, gathered over 15,000 participants to celebrate Malay identity.[10] In

December 2023, authorities issued summonses against nine activists under the Emergency Decree and Criminal Code provisions (Articles 116, 209, and 210).[11] Civil society actors have characterized this case as a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) aimed at suppressing cultural expression and civic engagement. The case is currently pending before the courts, with all defendants denying the charges.[12]

3. SLAPP and the Systematic Suppression of Human Rights Defenders

3.1 During the 2nd and 3rd UPR cycles, Thailand accepted recommendations to ensure the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) and to refrain from using laws to restrict fundamental freedoms[13]. However, in practice, HRDs in the Patani region continue to face legal harassment, intimidation, and criminal prosecution.[14] The use of criminal law by state authorities, including the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) Region 4 and the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), reflects a pattern of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP). These cases disproportionately target individuals engaged in monitoring, reporting, or providing humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected areas. Such practices are inconsistent with Thailand's obligations under the ICCPR, as well as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which requires States to protect individuals who promote and defend human rights. They also contradict UPR recommendations accepted by Thailand from States such as Norway, Germany, Switzerland, and Canada.

3.2 **Case example: Saharee Jehlong ("Pohban Jaiklaa"):** the case of Mr. Saharee Jehlong illustrates the criminalization of humanitarian action. His initiative, established in 2021, aimed to provide financial assistance and educational support to widows and children affected by extrajudicial killings. These beneficiaries are often excluded from state compensation schemes due to the alleged involvement of deceased family members in security-related cases.[15]

3.3 Despite the humanitarian nature of this work, security authorities interpreted these activities as support for insurgent groups and initiated criminal proceedings. This case raises serious concerns regarding the criminalization of humanitarian assistance and the failure to distinguish between legitimate social support and security threats.

3.4 **Case example: Anchana Heemmina (Duay Jai Group):** Ms. Anchana Heemmina, a prominent human rights defender and founder of the Duay Jai Group, was prosecuted under the Computer Crimes Act following a social media post concerning unpaid water bills owed by a military unit to a mosque. Although she corrected a minor factual error within 30 minutes, authorities pursued charges, citing damage to the reputation of the military unit. This case demonstrates the use of legal mechanisms to intimidate and silence human rights defenders, particularly those scrutinizing state conduct.[16] These patterns contribute to a broader climate of fear, undermining civil society engagement and restricting accountability mechanisms in the region.

4. Structural Impunity and the Evolution of Violations

4.1 Thailand has failed to fulfill its commitments under previously accepted UPR recommendations to ensure accountability for serious human rights violations, including those related to the Tak Bai incident. The Tak Bai tragedy, which resulted in 85 deaths in 2004, remains a key example of systemic impunity. Despite commitments to prosecute those responsible (UPR recommendations accepted from the United Kingdom and Canada), no high-level officials have been held accountable.[17] The expiration of the statute of limitations in 2024 further demonstrates the failure of domestic accountability mechanisms.[18]

4.2 Reparations provided by the State have largely been limited to financial compensation and have not included symbolic or structural measures, such as public acknowledgment, memorialization, or guarantees of non-recurrence. Data from civil society organizations indicates that between 2004 and 2025, at least 526 individuals have been killed in operations conducted by security forces, with additional cases reported in 2026.[19]

4.3 Notably, since the adoption of the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act, there has been a shift in operational patterns from custodial torture to extrajudicial killings at the scene ("in-situ executions").[20] This suggests an adaptation of practices to evade legal scrutiny under new accountability frameworks. These killings are often characterized by limited transparency, lack of independent investigation, and difficulties in identifying those responsible, raising serious concerns under international human rights law, including the right to life.

4.4 **Case example: Assassination of Kamolsak Leewamoh (2026):** the assassination of Mr. Kamolsak Leewamoh, a Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Law, Justice, and Human Rights, on 20 March 2026, represents a critical escalation.[21] Evidence linking the crime to a government vehicle associated with security forces raises serious concerns regarding the misuse of state resources and the targeting of individuals engaged in oversight and accountability.[22] This case illustrates how lawfare may evolve into extrajudicial violence, reinforcing a climate of fear and undermining democratic institutions. Ongoing investigations into those responsible will be a key test of Thailand's commitment to accountability and rule of law.

5. Structural Barriers to Participation and Accountability in the Peace Process (ICCPR Article 25)

5.1 Thailand has accepted UPR recommendations to promote public participation and inclusive governance. However, the peace dialogue process in the Patani region remains state-centric and exclusionary, failing to meet international standards under Article 25 of the ICCPR.

5.2 The absence of a formal legal framework governing the peace process has resulted in decision-making power being concentrated within security agencies, rather than civilian authorities. This limits democratic oversight and reduces the process to a technical security exercise rather than a genuine political dialogue. Although the Joint Comprehensive Plan for Peace (JCPP) identifies public consultation as a key component[23], the State has failed to create a safe and enabling environment for meaningful participation.[24] The continued use of lawfare, restrictions on freedom of expression, and surveillance of political activity significantly hinder the ability of stakeholders to engage freely and access information. As a result, public consultation processes risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive. These structural barriers undermine transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness, and prevent affected communities from meaningfully participating in decisions that impact their rights and future.

6. Recommendations

In line with Thailand's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and other relevant international human rights standards, as well as recommendations accepted during previous UPR cycles, the submitting organisations recommend that the Government of Thailand:

6.1 Regarding lawfare and the protection of civic space

a. Immediately and unconditionally withdraw all charges under Articles 116, 209, and 210 of the Criminal Code against individuals prosecuted for the peaceful exercise of their civil and political rights, including participation in public discussions, cultural activities, and academic expression.

b. Ensure that the use of criminal law complies with the principles of necessity and proportionality, and refrain from using legal provisions to criminalize peaceful expression, assembly, or discussions on governance and self-determination.

c. Guarantee a safe and enabling environment for public consultation and civic participation, in line with commitments accepted during the UPR process.

6.2 Regarding the right to self-determination and ICCPR compliance

a. Review and withdraw Thailand's interpretative declaration to Article 1 of the ICCPR to ensure that the right to self-determination is interpreted and implemented in accordance with international standards.

b. Recognize the distinction between internal self-determination (political participation and autonomy) and secession, and ensure that peaceful discussions on governance arrangements are not criminalized.

c. Refrain from applying criminal charges, including sedition and criminal association, to suppress peaceful political expression or academic discourse.

6.3 Regarding the protection of human rights defenders and prevention of SLAPP

a. Establish a distinct standalone Anti-SLAPP legislation, and amend the Criminal Procedure Code, including Sections 161/1 and 165/2, to establish stricter safeguards against the initiation of cases lacking merit, particularly those intended to harass or silence human rights defenders.

b. Adopt legal protections to ensure that humanitarian assistance, social support activities, and human rights monitoring are not criminalized or mischaracterized as threats to national security.

c. Implement concrete and transparent measures to prevent harassment, intimidation, and legal action against human rights defenders, in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

d. Ensure the safe, meaningful, and equal participation of women human rights defenders, in accordance with obligations under ICCPR and CEDAW.

6.4 Regarding accountability and impunity for serious human rights violations

a. Ensure prompt, independent, and impartial investigations into serious human rights violations, including the Tak Bai incident, and bring those responsible, including senior officials, to justice.

b. Provide comprehensive reparations to victims and their families, including not only financial compensation but also symbolic measures such as public acknowledgment, memorialization, and guarantees of non-recurrence.

c. Address patterns of extrajudicial killings by ensuring transparency, independent oversight, and accountability for all security operations.

d. Consider ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes

Against Humanity (1968), to strengthen accountability for serious human rights violations.

6.5 Regarding access to justice and international remedies

a. Ratify the First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR to allow individuals to submit complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee in cases where domestic remedies are ineffective or unavailable.

b. Strengthen domestic judicial mechanisms to ensure access to effective remedies, particularly in cases involving security forces and human rights violations.

6.6 Regarding inclusive and accountable peace processes (ICCPR Article 25)

a. Establish a formal, civilian-led framework for the peace process under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, ensuring transparency, accountability, and measurable outcomes.

b. Ensure that the peace dialogue process includes meaningful participation of affected communities, including representatives from the Patani region, civil society, and local stakeholders.

c. Create independent monitoring mechanisms to oversee the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan for Peace (JCPP).

d. Guarantee the organization of inclusive public consultations, ensuring that all stakeholders can participate freely, safely, and without fear of reprisal.

e. Ensure regular parliamentary oversight of the peace process to strengthen democratic accountability.

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April 2026

Submission by

The Patani Working Group for Monitoring on International Mechanisms is a civil society network established to monitor and document human rights conditions in the Patani region, with a particular focus on civil and political rights, access to justice, and the impact of security laws on local communities. The group works to amplify the voices of affected populations, promote accountability, and support policy advocacy aimed at advancing human rights and sustainable peace in the region.

The Hooman is a grassroots initiative dedicated to promoting human rights, social justice, and community empowerment, particularly among youth and marginalized groups in the Patani region. Through advocacy, public engagement, and creative communication, The Hooman seeks to raise awareness of human rights issues, challenge discrimination, and foster inclusive participation in civic and political spaces.

The Civil Society Assembly for Peace is a platform bringing together civil society organizations, community leaders, and local stakeholders to promote inclusive and participatory peacebuilding processes in the Patani region. The Assembly works to strengthen dialogue, build trust among different actors, and advocate for peaceful conflict resolution grounded in human rights principles and community participation.

Prof. Haji Sulong Abdulqadir Tohmeena Foundation is an organization committed to preserving the legacy of Prof. Haji Sulong and promoting human rights, cultural identity, and justice for the Malay Muslim community in the Patani region. The Foundation engages in research, public education, and advocacy to support the recognition of cultural rights, access to justice, and peaceful solutions to long-standing conflicts.

The **Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR and UN Mechanisms (Universal Periodic Review)**, established during Thailand's Second UPR cycle, is a people-led, intersectional feminist movement bringing together local communities and national civil society organisations across all human rights sectors. As one of the largest intersectional grassroots-led movements in Thailand, it engages with the UPR and UN treaty bodies, connecting struggles from Indigenous Peoples' rights, land and environmental justice, and labour rights to digital rights, freedom of expression, transnational repression, and the protection of human rights defenders, migrants, political refugees, youth, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and communities facing systemic marginalization. It fosters solidarity among communities facing shared challenges and strengthens collective action to demand accountability from the state and companies for their international human rights obligations.



THAILAND UPR IV 2026

Thai CSOs Coalition for the UPR and UN Mechanisms

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