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NEWS RELEASE



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EVICTIONS OF 14 SAB WAI
VILLAGERS FACING EXTREME
POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS!**



#SAVESABWAIVILLAGERS

#ClimateJustice #JustTransition

Stop Thailand's False Climate Solutions!

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THAILAND: STOP FORCED EVICTIONS OF 14 SAB WAI VILLAGERS FACING EXTREME POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS!

5 August 2022, Bangkok – On 4 August 2022, Manushya Foundation and Sai Thong Rak Pah Network submitted a [Complaint for Urgent Action](#) to 8 United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs, including the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. The complaint has been filed on behalf of [14 villagers from Sab Wai village](#), Chaiyaphum Province, Thailand, who were criminalized under Thailand's false climate solutions and are now in imminent danger of forced evictions and extreme poverty. The situation follows verdicts adjudicated by Thailand's Supreme Court in 2021, finding the 14 villagers [guilty](#) of forest encroachment in the Sai Thong National Park.^[1]

In Danger of Homelessness & Extreme Poverty

Forced evictions of the 14 impoverished villagers and their families would breach a number of internationally protected human rights that Thailand has the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill, including the villagers' right to housing, right to food, right to work, right to security of the person, right to the peaceful enjoyment of possessions, among others. As of now, the Thai government has not provided any appropriate alternative relocation site, and any adequate compensation, further violating international human rights standards relating to forced evictions.

"Our community has lived in the Sai Thong National Park for decades, long before its declaration as a protected area. I grew up in the forest and learnt how to respect it: our way of farming is sustainable and even though the [Thai] government blames us for destroying the forest, we actually help to protect it." said [Nittaya Muangklang](#), woman human rights defender and Sab Wai community leader who has been tirelessly advocating for the villagers' right to remain living on their lands and has faced threats and reprisals as a result.^[2] *"We clearly did not encroach on the national park, and we'll continue our fight for justice to live with the forest. As poor farmers, we are actually eligible for government's exemption, but instead we've been unfairly cast as criminals"* she added.

Manushya Foundation and the Sai Thong Rak Pah Network's [UN Complaint](#) highlights and denounces the imminent forced evictions and recent reprisals against the Sab Wai villagers, and brings attention to the future negative impacts of the evictions on the community including women, children, and the elderly. Beside the loss of food security and disposable income, losing access to arable land would also heighten the community's vulnerability to climate change impacts.

Need for a #JustTransition

Emilie Pradichit, Founder & Executive Director of Manushya Foundation, further explained: *"The Sab Wai villagers are Equal Human Beings who must be heard and recognized as Guardians of the Forest. Their farming focused on sturdy crops such as cassava not only protects the forest from destruction but also ensures resilience against climate change impacts that are going to be felt by local communities all over Thailand. That's why Thailand must sincerely shift to a Just, Inclusive, Green and Feminist Transition which ensures that community voices are heard and central in the planning and implementation phases of all climate mitigation measures."*

Regardless of its adverse impacts on the most marginalized communities, the Thai government, however, pursues a climate change mitigation pathway relying on forest sinks,[3] aiming at 40% of the total country area to be reforested before 2030.[4] The strategy would be crucial in reaching the new deadlines by which Thailand should achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2065, as announced by the Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha at last year's COP26.

"Instead of reforming its energy policy to effectively move away from fossil fuels to renewable and clean energy solutions, the Thai government is criminalizing forest-dependent communities and indigenous peoples in the name of reforestation. Our [UN Complaint](#) shows that this is a false climate solution that lags behind Thailand's international human rights obligations and climate action commitments." continued Emilie Pradichit. *"The Sab Wai villagers, similarly to communities from all over Thailand, become scapegoats of policies that sacrifice people rather than holding corporations, the real culprits of climate change, accountable,"* she concluded.

Stop Forced Evictions & Respect International Human Rights Standards

Manushya Foundation and the Sai Thong Rak Pah Network urge Thai authorities to halt the forced evictions and order a suspension of the villagers' civil penalties. Under circumstances when evictions are unavoidable, due international human rights standards must be upheld. Manushya Foundation also reminds the Thai government of its commitments taken at its Third Universal Periodic Review in 2021[5] as well as the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use endorsed by Thailand in April 2022.[6]

Access the Complaint for Urgent Action submitted to 8 UN Special Procedures to protect the human rights of the 14 Sab Wai villagers: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/complaint-for-urgent-action-savesabwaivillagers-from-forced-evictions>

Background on the Sab Wai Villagers case

What happened?

Despite settling on their land almost 20 years before the declaration of Sai Thong National Park in 1992, the Court of First Instance found the 14 Sab Wai villagers guilty of forest encroachment in 2018 with its verdict upheld by the Appeal Court in 2019[7] and the Supreme Court in 2021. The latter issued a **judgment sentencing 11 of the villagers to suspended jail terms ranging between 2-3 years and sent to prison 3 community members, two of whom are currently still imprisoned**. It also ordered them to vacate their homes and lands, payment of hefty civil penalties for alleged destruction of the forest, and civil service hours.

The villagers were sentenced under Thailand's old draconian forest conservation laws, the **Forest Act (1941), National Park Act (1961) and the National Reserved Forest Act (1964)**. Their enforcement, however, found new vigour after the enactment of 2014 Forest Reclamation Policy and especially NCPO Orders 64/2014 and 66/2014 of the National Council for Peace and Order. While Order 64/2014 aimed to cease deforestation and forest destruction, Order 66/2014 suggested that primary targets of these measures must be investors or large-scale outside developers, whereas the poor, landless and those who had settled on the land before it was declared a protected area, should not be affected by the NCPO order 64/2014.[8]

National Advocacy Efforts

Manushya Foundation started supporting the 14 Sab Wai villagers in their resistance against Thailand's false climate solutions in 2019. Since then, it has reinforced their human rights advocacy on the national level, through filing petitions to and facilitating communication with public agencies and monitoring their Appeal Court and Supreme Court hearings. Manushya Foundation led the public campaign [#SaveSabWaiVillagers](#) to inform the public about the case, gather wide public support for an online petition, and call for donations.[9]

As a result of our ongoing advocacy, coupled with the [online petition](#)^[10] and [open letter](#) to the President of the Supreme Court (March 2021) calling for the end of the villagers' criminalization,^[11] most of the Sab Wai villagers [walked out free](#) after their Supreme Court verdicts in 2021 and did not go back to jail. They were put on suspended jail terms but are still found guilty of forest encroachment, cast as criminals and destroyers rather than guardians of the forest.^[12] The Thai government's actions showcase its false and insincere commitment to a Just Transition.

Strategic Litigation before the United Nations

On the international level, Manushya Foundation advocated for the Sab Wai villagers' rights through the [UN Submission for Urgent Appeal for Protection of the 14 Sab Wai villagers](#) made to seven UN Special Rapporteurs in June 2019.^[13] As a result, four UN Special Rapporteurs issued a [Joint UN Communication](#) on 19 August 2019 that propelled the Thai Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE) to issue a memorandum on 14 November 2019, recognizing the 14 Sab Wai villagers as 'poor' and therefore eligible for protection under the NCPO Order 66/2014. However, in its disappointing [official response](#) to the Joint Communication from 10 June 2020, the Royal Thai Government only provided misleading and false statements, disregarding the MONRE memorandum and avoiding responsibility for the human rights violations suffered by the Sab Wai villagers. Nevertheless, the international attention brought to the Sab Wai Villagers case pressured Thai authorities to not send the villagers back to jail.

Learn more about our impact and work to [#SaveSabWaiVillagers](#) from jail, forced evictions, and extreme poverty and to denounce Thailand's false climate solutions:

- [#SaveSabWaiVillagers](#): Digital campaign supporting Manushya Foundation's efforts on Sab Wai case.
- [News Release](#): Thailand: End the unfair criminalisation of land rights defenders in Sai Thong National Park, 19 June 2019
- [Submission for Urgent Action to 7 UN Special Rapporteurs](#): [#SaveSabWaiVillagers](#) from going to jail! The unfair criminalization of 14 villagers under Thailand's Forest Reclamation Policy, 23 June 2019
- [Joint Statement](#): Human Rights Organisations urge Thai government to drop all charges against women land and human rights defenders in Ban Sap Wai community, 24 June 2019
- [News Release](#): Thailand: Ensure the provision of fair justice & effective remedy to land rights defenders unfairly criminalised in the Sai Thong National Park Case, 8 July 2019
- [Racial Discrimination in Thailand](#): Joint Civil Society Report: List of Themes to be considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) for the review of the combined fourth to eighth periodic reports of Thailand (CERD/C/THA/4-8), 2020
- [Joint Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#): Land-related rights, forest conservation laws and climate change policies, 25 March 2021
- [Manushya Foundation's Factsheet to inform Thailand's Third UPR](#): Khon Isaan, 9 September 2021
- [Manushya Foundation's Factsheet to inform Thailand's Third UPR](#): Thailand's False Climate Solutions with Bad Forest Conservation Laws, 13 September 2021
- [#FightRacism - Thailand is a Paradise; But only for the 1%](#): Joint Shadow Civil Society Report on the Implementation of ICERD: Replies to the List of Themes CERD/C/THA/Q/4-8 105th CERD session (15 November - 3 December), 25 October 2021

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ENDNOTES

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2. Manushya Foundation, “#SaveNittaya from Going to Jail because of Thailand's Unfair Forest Reclamation Policy”, (9 February 2021), available at: <https://youtu.be/G06itS0cVfM>; Manushya Foundation, #SaveNittaya From Going to Jail Because of Thailand's Unfair Forest Reclamation Policy, (9 February 2021), available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/post/savenittaya-from-going-to-jail-because-of-thailand-s-unfair-forest-reclamation-policy>; Manushya Foundation, #SaveNittaya - What You Need to Know about Nittaya's Unfair Court Verdicts, (6 May 2021), available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/post/savenittaya-what-you-need-to-know-about-nittaya-s-unfair-court-verdict>
3. Manushya Foundation, *Is the Thai Government 'Greenwashing' us?*, (25 April 2022), available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/post/is-the-thai-government-greenwashing-us>
4. Manushya Foundation, #SaveSabWaiVillagers from Forced Evictions & Extreme Poverty! *The Unfair Criminalization of 14 Villagers under Thailand's "Forest Reclamation Policy"*, Legal Analysis of the Case, available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/campaign-savesabwaivillagers-our-analysis-of-the-case>
5. Manushya Foundation, *Thailand's false climate solutions violate human rights!*, (18 January 2022), available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/post/thailand-s-false-climate-solutions-violate-human-rights>
6. Manushya Foundation, *Is the Thai Government 'Greenwashing' us?*, (25 April 2022), available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/post/is-the-thai-government-greenwashing-us>; and Bangkok Tribune, *Thailand to take part in the global forest and land use protection declaration, almost five-month delay in action*, (21 April 2022), available at: <https://bkktribune.com/thailand-to-take-part-in-the-global-forest-and-land-use-protection-declaration-almost-five-month-delay-in-action/>
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10. Manushya Foundation, #SaveSabWaiVillagers from Forced Evictions & Extreme Poverty! *The Unfair Criminalization of 14 Villagers under Thailand's "Forest Reclamation Policy"*, Online Petition to endorse the Open Letter to the President of the Supreme Court, available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/campaign-savesabwaivillagers-savenittaya>
11. Manushya Foundation, *Submitting an Open Letter to the President of the Supreme Court to #SaveNittaya!*, (1 March 2021), available at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/post/submitting-an-open-letter-to-the-president-of-the-supreme-court-to-savenittaya>
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About Manushya Foundation

Manushya Foundation was founded in 2017 with the vision to build a movement of Equal Human Beings #WeAreManushyan. Manushya is an intersectional feminist human rights organization reinforcing the power of humans, in particular women, human rights defenders, indigenous peoples, forest-dependent communities, environmental defenders, LGBTI groups, and Youth, to be at the heart of decision-making processes that concern them and to speak truth to power at the forefront of their fight for Human Rights, Equality, Social Justice and Peace. Through coalition building, capacity building, community-led research, advocacy and campaigning, and sub-granting, local communities become Agents of Change fighting for their rights and providing solutions to improve their lives and livelihoods, pushing back on authoritarian governments and harmful corporations. Manushya defends local communities and seeks justice with them before the United Nations, focusing on women's rights and gender equality, digital rights, climate & environmental justice, and corporate accountability across Asia.

For further information on the work of Manushya Foundation, visit:

<https://www.manushyafoundation.org/>