

Buddhist Peace Fellowship
P.O. Box 3470
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4.18.07

*Letter from Buddhist Peace Fellowship's International Advisory Council
& friends in support of Sulak Sivaraksa*

Dear ...

In August, 2006, Sulak Sivaraksa was charged in Bangkok with lèse majesté because he sharply criticized Thailand's Thaksin Shinawatra administration in an interview with *Fah Diew Kan* (Same Sky) magazine. Following the publication of an article in *Seeds of Peace* (Vol. 21, No. 1, January-April 2005), a second similar charge against Ajahn Sulak was placed on September 18, 2006, one day prior to a coup against the Thaksin government.

Lèse majesté has re-emerged as a political weapon in Thailand. While the first charge against Ajahn Sulak was raised by the controversial Thaksin administration, it is sustained and added to by the current military regime of Prime Minister Gen. Surayud Chulanont, installed by a coup. For Thaksin, the lèse majesté charge was a cynical, distracting ploy. For the current government, it suggests that old-line authoritarianism, endemic to Thai politics in the past, still has life.

In the April 11 edition of *The Nation*, we note that "prosecutors decided yesterday to drop charges of lèse majesté against deposed prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, saying they lacked solid evidence to prove malicious intent against His Majesty the King." Newspapers around the world announced on April 12 that King Bhumibol himself has pardoned a Swiss national Oliver Jufer, sentenced last month to ten years in prison for defacing portraits of the king. Yet grave charges against Mr. Sivaraksa have not yet been dropped.

We who have come to know and respect Sulak Sivaraksa through his extensive writings and through his many decades of working as an engaged Buddhist for international peace and social justice, protest this ongoing prosecution.

Sulak Sivaraksa's work and his participation in Thailand's movement for democracy accord with his faith as a Buddhist. Indeed, Ajahn Sulak's published memoir is titled *Loyalty Demands Dissent: Autobiography of an Engaged Buddhist*. At the age of 74, Sulak Sivaraksa has always been a man who speaks honestly and strongly about matters that are essential and not always "convenient": democracy, human rights, justice, and the interdependence of all life. His understanding of the monarchy is that the King broadly supports and is supported by the Thai people, and does not serve the political elites or narrow interests of any stripe.

Instead of using resources to persecute loyal citizens like Sulak Sivaraksa, we urge the Thai government and the Royal Police to investigate fully, and to prosecute the murders of environmental, human rights, and community activists such as Phra Supoj Suvacano (a Buddhist monk killed in June 2005) and Somchai Neelaphaijit (a Muslim lawyer abducted in March 2004). We humbly suggest that loyalty to a beloved king means upholding the Rajadhammas (Virtues of Rulers), including justice and non-violence.

As foreign friends of Thailand we hope the new administration uphold the Rajadhammas in replacing authoritarian ways of the past. We respectfully request Prime Minister Gen. Surayud Chulanont to direct Police General Sereepisuth Temeeyaves, Chief of the National Royal Thai Police, to terminate all charges against Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa at the earliest opportunity.

Respectfully, in dhamma,

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