

Bangkok South Criminal Court today ordered for the immediate issuance of an arrest warrant for British human rights activist Andy Hall, who has been embroiled in multiple controversial defamation cases brought by pineapple processor Natural Fruit Co. since 2013.

The court made the order with a view to ensuring Hall's attendance for a verdict of the Appeals Court on multiple appeals against his September 2016 criminal conviction, which stemmed from his auditing work into alleged labor abuse at the company which was detailed in a report for Finnish NGO Finnwatch.

Diplomats from the EU Mission to Thailand alongside U.K., Finnish and Swedish embassy officials and officials from OHCHR and ICJ attended today's hearing alongside Hall's legal defence team, a source at the court informed Finnwatch.

The court was originally expected to read the appeals verdict today but the hearing on the appeal was instead adjourned until May 31, 2018 given Hall did not attend the court in person.

Hall is no longer a resident in Thailand and attests that he was not formally summonsed to attend the court today through any official or lawful channels.

In response to the news, Hall said he had faced "intolerable amounts of judicial harassment" in Thailand, which essentially undermined his ability to do human rights work effectively in the country.

"This is why I left the country in November 2016. I am disappointed and concerned this warrant has now being issued for my arrest and this unacceptable judicial harassment against me continues unabated," he said.

"I am currently receiving assistance from a team of international lawyers acting on my behalf on the issue of enforcement of Thai Court orders in criminal and civil cases against me when I am no longer resident in Thailand.

"I shall continue to consult closely with both my Thai and international legal defence teams on these issues and concerning potential issuance of international arrest warrants against me."

Hall will also make representations to the U.K. government and the EU to immediately raise

concerns on whether the arrest warrant issuance was in accordance with Thai and international law.

On September 20, 2016, Hall was sentenced to four years' imprisonment (reduced by one year and suspended by two years) and ordered to pay a fine of 200,000 baht (reduced to 150,000 baht) following his conviction on criminal defamation and Computer Crimes Act charges.

Hall left Thailand shortly after his conviction claiming unbearable judicial harassment when additional criminal charges were filed against him by a chicken farm, Thammakaset Company Ltd, in November 2016.

His legal team however submitted an appeal against this conviction on 8th February 2017. Natural Fruit also appealed the verdict in December 2016 seeking an immediate custodial sentence against Hall. An Appeals Court's decision can be further appealed to Thailand's Supreme Court.

In 2012, Andy Hall interviewed Natural Fruit Co. Ltd. workers for the Finnwatch report 'Cheap Has a High Price', published in 2013. These interviewees' testimonies detailed allegations of labor abuse which, when published by Finnwatch, provided the reason for Natural Fruit's prosecution in this case.

Should Hall fail to appear at Bangkok South Criminal Court again on May 31, 2018, the Appeals Court verdict may be read in absentia.

"We remain hopeful the Appeals Court will acquit Andy of all these charges. The charges against him stem from his legitimate work as a human rights defender and migrant worker rights activist. He is not a criminal," said Sonja Vartiala, executive director of Finnwatch.

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