

PRESS RELEASE**28th August 2014****Finnwatch Researcher's Trial Begins in Bangkok on 2nd Sept, European Buyers Warn Thai Food Industry of Consequences**

Finnwatch, journalists, researchers, food industry leaders and migrant workers will next week take the witness stand in the criminal trial of Natural Fruit Co. Ltd vs. Andy Hall. Meanwhile, an international consumer campaign calling on the Thai pineapple industry to show responsibility and respect rights defenders is gaining momentum with support from unions, rights groups and buyers.

The trial of British migrant rights activist Andy Hall, to begin at Prakanong Court in Bangkok on 2nd Sept, will be the first of 4 prosecutions undertaken by the Natural Fruit Company Ltd. This first trial relates to allegations of criminal defamation by Hall against Natural Fruit in an Aljazeera interview.

The criminal trial will last 6 days, ending on 10th Sept. During the first 3 days, the Attorney General and Natural Fruit Company Ltd. will present evidence. According to advance filings, the prosecution will call workers, policemen and labour officials as witnesses whilst presenting audits compiled by Swiss inspection, verification, testing and Certification Company SGS as additional evidence.

From 5th Sept onwards, Andy Hall's legal team will then present their evidence. The defence will call as witnesses migrant workers who previously fled from Natural Fruit's factory, researchers, food industry leaders, Aljazeera journalist Wayne Hay and Finnwatch Executive Director Sonja Vartiiala. Both prosecution and defence teams have the right to cross examine each others' witnesses.

"The judge previously suggested the court required migrant workers from Natural Fruit actually interviewed by Hall to give evidence in the case to prove Hall's innocence. Ethically and practically protecting such witnesses is a huge challenge," Ms Vartiiala states.

Finland's embassy in Bangkok will observe the trial whilst global union federations will also send a trial monitor. Also UK embassy has confirmed to attend the trial and has encouraged other EU missions to participate also.

The court will likely issue its judgement by the end of October. Meanwhile, more serious computer crimes and criminal defamation cases against Hall begin almost immediately after the first trial ends on 15th Sept. A US\$10m civil defamation damages case is also currently underway.

This trial draws added negative international attention to Thailand's food export industry at a sensitive time after a recent Tier 3 US trafficking report downgrade. Threats of additional prosecutions of Hall by the Thai Pineapple Industry Association (TPIA) were made in past weeks in response to an international campaign to drop the charges. TPIA's reaction spurred further protests.

International unions and rights organisations demand the Thai pineapple industry

advance dialogue with civil society and implement swift procedures to improve the often dire working conditions in the industry. This coming week, several new international consumer campaigns will also begin.

“Thailand is the world’s largest pineapple producer. Instead of issuing threats and exploiting workers, it is time the industry changed its approach. Otherwise, there is a danger companies and consumers will no longer want to buy Thai products,” Ms. Vartiala said.

European buyer United Nordic, in a letter made public this week, strongly warned that they don't want to see the behaviour of Natural Fruit spreading to its suppliers: *"We are greatly worried and concerned... We believe this development can further hurt the Thai food industry."* The buyer urged industry to *'actively promote engagement of constructive dialogue with organisations and civil society, as opposed to taking legal action.'*

Several other European retailers and businesses are also discussing TPIA's position and more reactions will follow in the coming weeks.

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For more information on campaigns to drop charges against Andy Hall, please visit: <http://business-humanrights.org/en/appeal-to-thai-pineapple-industry-association-urge-natural-fruit-to-drop-cases-against-researcher-activist-andy-hall>.

For more on the case against Andy Hall, please visit: www.andyjhall.wordpress.com

For more on Finnwatch, please visit: www.finnwatch.org/en