

Media Briefing 14th Nov 2014

Preliminary Hearing Begins 17th Nov in Finnwatch Researcher Andy Hall's Most Serious Criminal Prosecution in Thailand

The first preliminary hearing into serious computer crimes and criminal defamation (by publication) charges brought against Andy Hall by Natural Fruit Company Ltd., a Thai pineapple export factory, will begin on Mon. 17th Nov at 1:30pm in Court 406, Southern Bangkok Criminal Court. Natural Fruit launched multiple criminal and civil prosecutions against Hall, a migration researcher and activist, since Feb. 2013 as a result of his contribution to a Finnwatch report published in Jan. 2013. The report revealed serious human rights violations at Natural Fruit's pineapple juice production facilities.

The commencement of this second criminal case prosecution comes less than 3 weeks after Prakanong Court on 29th Oct 2014, citing unlawful investigation processes, dismissed less serious criminal defamation charges filed by Natural Fruit against Hall. Natural Fruit will reportedly appeal this decision, alongside the prosecutor's office concerned.

- We are concerned that persecution and harassment of Hall is continuing with this second criminal charge coming to court, says Sonja Vartiala, the Executive Director of Finnwatch.

During Hall's first criminal defamation trial at Prakanong Court, relating to an interview he gave to Aljazeera, the court heard amongst others the testimony of a former worker of Natural Fruit who testified the factory was hiring under aged children and paid unlawfully low salaries to its workers. The court hearings were yet another confirmation that, as Finnwatch's report revealed, there remain serious challenges in working conditions at Natural Fruit. The witness who testified last week filed police and embassy/government complaints due to threats made against him.

If Hall is found guilty of the latest criminal charges filed against him at Bangkok South Criminal Court, he could face up to seven years in prison. This is in addition to a sentence of up to 1 one year in prison relating to the Prakanong Court criminal case currently under appeal and two further civil cases where US\$14 million damages are being claimed from Hall by Natural Fruit.

– Finnwatch demands Natural Fruit now drop all the charges against Andy Hall. Instead of allowing companies to bring human rights activists to court, Thailand needs to prosecute companies like Natural Fruit, who are violating labour rights, says Vartiala.

Finnwatch and hundreds of other international NGO's and trade unions regard the court proceedings against Andy Hall as judicial harassment and see his important and

successful work is being seriously hindered by these actions. On 29th October 2014, international demonstrations were held in Finland, Netherlands, UK and the United States to support Andy Hall.

For further information, please contact:

1. Sonja Vartiala, Executive Director, Finnwatch: +358(0)445687465, sonja.vartiala@finnwatch.org
2. Andy Hall, Migration Researcher: +66(0)846119209, andyjhall1979@gmail.com, twitter @atomicalandy
3. Nakhon Chomphuchart, Legal Advisor to Andy Hall: +66(0)818473086, nakhonct@gmail.com

For further information, see our previous document "Q&A Criminal Trial of Natural Fruit vs. Andy Hall" (updated on 27th Oct) available at http://finnwatch.org/images/QA_Andy_Hall_ENGLISH_FINAL_2710.pdf

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