



## **Defend Democracy and Safeguard People's Rights and Welfare**

20 May 2022, Bangkok

Today, democracy is under the threat of the growing menace of authoritarianism. Eight years since the military coup d'etat that ended civilian rule, Thailand sees a tightening grip of military control, harassment of opposition figures and curtailment of dissent. Thailand's Prime Minister Chan-ocha has yet to show the full extent of his ability to repress the democratic forces but has actively used the legal apparatus to silence his regime's critics. Likewise, his regime has engineered the constitution in order to ensure the dominance of military rule.

The multiple cases filed against former Future Forward Party Leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit are a blatant attempt to silence and weaken the opposition against the military rule. These cases are engineered to have a chilling effect on all expression of dissent and as retaliation against the persistent political opposition. This is also clearly timed to thwart the momentum of the democratic opposition leading up to the Bangkok and Pattaya gubernatorial and local elections.

While such is the case in Thailand, it is in no way unique. We are seeing the same pattern across many Asian countries. The erosion of democratic values and institutions are becoming more common. Political opposition, human rights activists, and journalists are facing continued harassment and threats to their safety. Human rights abuses have become more rampant under the current dispensation with little to no accountability for those in power.

Like Thailand, Myanmar's military dictatorship continues to tighten their grip on power despite the mounting mass opposition by their people. The Myanmar Military Junta has shown its willingness to murder its own civilian population to maintain their rule and declare a de facto war on its own people.

We are also seeing a worrying trend of continued democratic backslide as the case in the Philippines with the return of the Marcos family to power. No doubt Ferdinand Marcos Jr will seek to whitewash his father's legacy of plunder and human rights abuses and continue the process of undermining the democratic institutions, a process begun by his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte.

In India, Prime Minister Modi and his BJP have continued their attacks on the country's religious and cultural minorities and threatens the secular values of their country.

In Malaysia, the betrayal of the mandate of the people through defections led to the fall of the democratically elected Pakatan Harapan government in 2018 to the return of the hegemony of United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and has halted the needed reforms, including reforming public institutions such as the judiciary, the Parliament, the anti-corruption commission, the election commission and other bodies, although some are in progress because of the "Political Transformation and Stability" Memorandum of Understanding signed between Pakatan Harapan (Coalition of Hope) and the UMNO government.

Amid these efforts of political consolidation by the authoritarian regimes and leaders is the continued problem of economic and social inequality that has been designed to maintain the status quo. This problem together with the climate crisis and the pandemic have put enormous pressures on our societies. Clearly, our movement must push forward an alternative that advances democracy and puts forth systemic solutions to address the other crises we face.

As social democrats and progressives, we must continue to stand firm and defend the democratic values and protect the democratic institutions that are currently under assault. Likewise, it is imperative that for us to link up arms with fellow democrats of all stripes, mass movements, and citizens movements to stand guard against any attack on the people's human rights and welfare.

We must also commit to pursuing a new vision for social democracy that addresses the political, economic, social, and ecological needs of our societies. Such will entail vigorous engagement in electoral struggle where it is needed.

While we seek to advance democracy, we will continue to pursue the struggle for economic and social equality, social welfare and protection for all, and for the full recovery our societies from this pandemic.

There is no other way to advance democracy and the people's rights but through persistent struggle. The night is darkest before the coming of dawn.