



Statement from Wat Phra Dhammakaya
8 March 2017, 13.00 hrs.

Today marks Day 21 of Human Rights violations at Wat Phra Dhammakaya and the government has spent an estimated 60-100 million Thai baht of taxpayer's money thus far.

"Is Thailand truly a Buddhist country? Why is the law being used to essentially execute Buddhist monks?"

Ordination is considered a rebirth within the Vinaya or monastic disciplinary code that was laid down by the Buddha. A Buddhist monk's age begins from the day of ordination. A person who first ordains as a Buddhist monk when they are 80 years old must show his respects to a young monk who is only 20 years old even if the young monk had ordained only one day before him.

The current laws in Thailand are being unjustly enforced against Buddhist monks. When a monk is a suspect in a criminal case, and should investigating officers need to hold him in custody or if bail were denied by the court, the monk would have to be disrobed. He would be removed from the monkhood even before the verdict is reached. The idea here is, "If he's innocent, he can ordain again."

Let's compare this to the case of laypersons. If an accused person were taken into custody, and the law states that he must be executed immediately, with the reason that, "If he is found to be innocent before the court of law, they can just reincarnate." Everyone can see that this type of law is extremely unjust.

There were many Buddhist monks who were forced to disrobe because the investigating officer would not allow bail. For example, Most Venerable Udom of Wat Thepsirind was involved in a "royal regalia" case that made headlines. Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that Most Ven. Udom was not guilty. Who was accountable for the damage done? Ven. Udom eventually passed away, brokenhearted from the injustices he received.

In Thailand, the judicial system follows an accusatorial system. That is, officials bring forth accusations against a defendant, and the defendant must fight it in court. Since there is no jury, a single judge decides the cases. It is extremely dangerous, because officials can bully Buddhist monks and defrock them at any time.

Wat Phra Dhammakaya has been accused of over 300 separate charges in the short span of just one month, and many of the lawsuits could result in denial of bail. There is a goal to ask the court to hold the monks in custody. This is an obvious form of discrimination because the charges for some of these lawsuits are not even clearly defined. The lawsuits are of the same nature, should they be charges against any other suspect, they would be granted bail. But here

the monks have to take the risk of being disrobed. In the Thai judicial system, there is no jury and a single judge decides the case. Since hundreds of cases have yet to be ruled, one single error can result in the immediate removal of a monk from the monkhood.

Even in Islam, followers call for the use of Sharia law for Muslims.

Therefore, it is now the time to abandon this shoddy legal system. This system is being used as a tool to destroy Buddhism, to execute Buddhist monks from their monastic disciplinary code.

Therefore, we call for the following:

1. No forcible disrobing of monk(s) if the case has not yet reached a final ruling at the highest appeal.
2. Court's procedure in cases involving monks should be on a cross-examination investigation basis, giving authority to the court in seeking the facts and additional witnesses for the case, not just what the prosecutor presents to the court, so the monk(s) may receive a more just ruling.
3. In cases involving a monk, there should be a monastic court and a council specifically for investigating monks who have been accused of a crime. This council should include a representative member of the Sangha as well. The court should consider the monastic discipline alongside with secular laws. If there is not enough evidence, then the case should end there. If there is enough evidence, then the case should enter the judicial process.
4. Interrogations should be done in a suitable temple, so as to preserve the image of the Sangha.
5. Important cases that are considered to be in the public's interest should be overseen by Buddhist organizations globally, because monks all over the world adhere to the same monastic discipline of the Buddha.

"Stop the execution of monks from the monkhood. Stop this system of allegations against monks."