

112WATCH

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OPEN LETTER IN SUPPORT OF VOICE OF AMERICA

It is disheartening to learn that VOA (Voice of America) Thai's news operation has come to a halt for the first time in more than 80 years this month (March 2025). For many years, it has been recognized that VOA, as an organization, has followed and valued the Thai Service's unbiased, informative, and comprehensive reports on the political challenges faced by Thailand and its neighbouring countries.

In the past five years, the Thai authorities have ratcheted up their crackdowns on pro-democratic movements, resulting in almost 2,000 people being charged for their involvement, 45 of whom were jailed or denied bail under the controversial royal defamation law, or lèse-majesté law, which includes one juvenile. While some fled the countries seeking refuge under a life-threatening risk as at least nine of those had been missing and presumed dead during decades-long political persecution. VOA has therefore been a reliable source for these stories, while most local media coverages are muted. The Thai Service's commitment to bring to light truth on the consequential yet sensitive topics helps foster transparency, accountability, and due process in Thailand's judiciary system.

The professionalism in VOA journalistic work is undoubtedly key to accurately and impartially informing the Thai audience and encouraging a constructive dialogue among the citizens on issues fundamental to its democratic journey. More importantly, the ability of the Thai Service to produce stories about Thai political dissidents who were forced into tragic disappearances in Cambodia and Laos serves as a unique strength to expose trans-border crimes in Southeast Asia that recently become prevalent. The deteriorating situation in the past two years only encourages China to assert its influence with an outlier motive to suppress transparency and due process, while expanding economic control.

VOA has opened the door for our many pro-democracy activities in the United States. In recent memories, VOA thoroughly covered the two 112WATCH exhibitions: "Faces of Victims of 112" at the LeRoy Neiman Gallery at Columbia University in September 2023, and "There is a Dead Man Inside" at Harvard Kennedy School in September 2024. It would have been impossible to display this kind of exhibitions in Thailand. 112WATCH admires the courageous journalism on the part of VOA.

For these reasons, we regard VOA Thai as enormously effective in bolstering democratic values, countering misinformation by autocratic regimes, and enabling thoughtful discussions among the Thais about the political future of their country which is one of the U.S. oldest allies in Asia. The absence of VOA Thai's programming has a rippling effect on pro-democratic communities in Thailand and its neighbouring countries. Therefore, we strongly urge its operations to be restored as soon as possible.

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