Name

Angkhana Neelapaichit

Position: Director
Organization: Group on Justice for Peace
Expertise: Human Rights
Contact: 73/5 Soi Issaraphap 11, Issaraphap Road, Thonburi, Bangkok 10600. Thailand.
Telephone: +66 2 975 9975

Biology

Ms. Neelapaichit is Director at the Group on Justice for Peace. She was born in 1956 in Thonburi province from a Muslim-Buddhist Thai family. Ms. Angkhana received a scholarship from Mahidol University and obtained her BA in Nursing. During October of her freshman year, Ms. Angkhana witnessed the bloody October 6, 1976 events whereby Thai uniformed police crushed the student movement in Thailand,
causing the death of numerous students and triggering the fight of many students into
the jungle—students whose commitment and strength have continuously inspired her.
She mobilized other nursing students to offer medical care to the injured. During her
second year, she organized her fellow students in a successful campaign to demand
that Mahidol University grant a BA degree for Nursing graduates rather than a
certificate. This recognized the rigor of the course, the commitment of the students,
and the value of the nursing profession in Thailand. She was among the first student
to receive a Bachelor’s degree in Nursing in Thai history. She practiced nursing for
only two years, enough time to be exposed to the difficulties the poor face in accessing
health care, before deciding to raise her five children and support her husband’s work.
Ms. Angkhana’s husband, Somchai Neelaphaichit, mysteriously disappeared on
March 12, 2004, attracting immense national and international attention. She began
working to find answers and justice. In the course of her personal struggle, she has
received death threats and intimidation as well as attempts to buy her off; she has
become well versed in the field of human rights and established an organization to
fight against disappearances in Thailand. On the second anniversary of her husband’s
abduction, both her struggle and his were acknowledged when she was awarded the
2nd Asian Human Rights Defender Award from the Asia Human Rights Commission.
She also received an award from the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand
and is a 2006 joint recipient of the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights. Acting as Mr.
Somchai’s paralegal, Ms. Angkhana managed case files and briefs, organized and
cajoled pro bono lawyers while starting a business to sustain her family. Since the day
Mr. Somchai disappeared, she decided she would not play the role of victim. Her work
is not about Mr. Somchai and his case; it is about resisting a system of impunity and
achieving justice for all of Thailand’s citizens.