

# [Article 112 Reform in the Provinces](#)

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KHON KAEN - The Campaign Committee to Amend Article 112 of the Criminal Code (CCAA 112), the first aggressive, nationwide campaign to reform the world's harshest lèse-majesté law, made its way to Khon Kaen this past Sunday with a panel discussion and petition-signing held at Khon Kaen University (KKU). Over 100 signatories gathered in the Kwan Mor Hotel to endorse the amendment drafted by the small group of Thammasat Law lecturers know as the Nitirat group.

Both CCAA 112 and the Nitirat group have come under intense criticism since [the search for 10,000 signatures began](#) on January 15. For many Thais, the proposal to amend the lèse-majesté law has been construed as a direct attack on long-reigning King Bhumibol Adulyadej himself, and in response, social media users and demonstrators have spared little vitriol for the movement.

Long considered the third rail of Thai politics, the lèse-majesté law has garnered increased media scrutiny and international attention in the past few years as the number of charges have grown by 1500%: from 33 charges in 2005 to 478 reported charges in 2010. Furthermore, the law's minimum mandatory sentence is an exceptional three years long, with a maximum sentence of 15 years for a single count.

Though Sunday's Khon Kaen discussion proceeded without incident, KKU's academics were conspicuously absent, with much of the modest crowd composed of local Red Shirts, independent community members, and student activists.

Boonwat Chumpradit, a Khon Kaen Red Shirt villager in attendance, found the silence of KKU's professors troubling. "Professors at the university should be the ones leading us," she said. "We shouldn't have to be the ones leading them."

Still, the campaign is so politically treacherous that even a professor from the Nitirat group declined to attend Khon Kaen's meeting, telling the event's organizer that it might endanger his relationship with his employer, Thammasat University. His fears seem to have been justified. The following day, Thammasat University rector Somkit Lertpaithoon [announced on his Facebook page](#) that Nitirat was banned from meeting on university property.

Complicating matters is the second campaign launched by Nitirat on January 22 that, among other things, seeks to nullify the legal effects of the 2006 military coup that ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Critics, however, claim this is simply a veiled attempt to pardon Mr. Thaksin for his 2008 corruption conviction. As a result, the group is seen as unthinkably transgressive: both pro-Thaksin and anti-monarchy. Indeed, over 200 members of Khon Kaen Residents Who Love the King gathered at the city's spirit house on Friday night to protest the group on these very grounds.

Sunday's motley crew of attendees cut across social, if not political boundaries. There were out-and-proud Red Shirts ("I came because I'm a Red Shirt... everyone should be able to critique [the king] just like they can critique a movie star."), adamantly color-less university technicians ("The movement to correct the constitution is different from the Red Shirt movement."), closeted Marxists, Yingluck apologists ("In truth Yingluck wants to change the law, but there are many factions in Thailand and she doesn't want to fight with all these groups."), and the likes of Ms. Boonwat, who came dressed to the nines in a floppy-brimmed red hat and flowing red dress.

At times, this audience grew rowdy and vocal as they were stirred to applause and cheers by the

seminar's three speakers: Prawet Praphanukul, lawyer to the anti-112 poster-child, Da Torpedo, Wad Rawee from CCAA 112, and Phornchai Yuanyee, Secretary of the Thai Undergraduate Student Union. Together they addressed the history, contradictions, absurdities, and abuses surrounding the lèse-majesté law.

As Sunday afternoon's seminar came to a close and the floor was opened up to audience members, one KKU student took the microphone and pleaded for more action. "After we sign the petitions, we need to get in touch with our Pheu Thai representatives," he said. "We are the ones who elected these representatives and now we need to get in touch with them and get them to change this law."

This outlook, however, is bleak. Late last week, numerous Pheu Thai representatives [swore off making any changes](#) to Article 112. "The government and the Pheu Thai Party will never change Section 112 of the Criminal Code," Deputy Prime Minister Chalerm Yubamrung said. "Even the thought of it can send us to hell."

The next anti-112 event to be held in Khon Kaen is tentatively scheduled for February 27.

*[Correction February 28, 2012: An earlier version of this story incorrectly reported that there was a 1500% growth in lèse-majesté "cases" between 2005 and 2010. However, the 1500% increase was actually in lèse-majesté charges issued in that time frame, oftentimes with several charges filed in a single case. The article has been amended to reflect this change.]*