

[Human Rights Watch: Police Blamed for Killing Drug Suspect](#)

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Parliamentary Findings Demand Strong Action to Combat Police Brutality

By: [Human Rights Watch](#)

New York, March 16, 2012 -A Thai parliamentary inquiry that found that police used excessive force in the fatal shooting of a drug suspect should prompt an immediate criminal investigation and prosecution of those responsible, Human Rights Watch said today. On March 14, 2012, the parliamentary Police Affairs Committee announced its findings in the shooting death of Pairote Saengrit, a 24-year-old engineer, in Sakon Nakhon province.

On the night of December 27, 2011, police from the Sakon Nakhon provincial anti-drug squad shot and killed Pairote, saying he was a drug trafficker who was trying to evade arrest after a car chase. The police claimed that they fired at Pairote in self-defense, but Pairote and the two passengers in his car were later found by police to have been unarmed.

“The parliamentary committee’s findings in Pairote’s death should prompt a serious and impartial criminal investigation into possible police misconduct,” said [Brad Adams](#), Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The government’s nationwide drug crackdown is not a green light for the police to operate above the law.”

Denchai Saengrit, Pairote’s elder brother, told Human Rights Watch that Pairote was driving with him and Pairote’s girlfriend, Panadda Kwanma, to have dinner at the Kin Deum Restaurant near Kasetsart University’s Sakon Nakhon campus. At around 9 p.m., as their car arrived at the restaurant, a group of men in civilian clothes fired at them twice from the rear. To escape the gunfire, Pairote drove the car into the university campus.

An unmarked pickup truck chased Pairote’s car from the restaurant into the campus and then out to the main road. DENCHAI said that the pickup truck cut off Pairote’s car. Two more gunshots were heard and a bullet struck Pairote in the head, killing him instantly. Five men in civilian clothes then approached the car and ordered out DENCHAI and Panadda, who begged for her life.

The men then identified themselves as police from Sakon Nakhon provincial command and said Pairote was a wanted drug trafficker. According to DENCHAI, police said at the scene that they found no drugs either in Pairote’s car or on the bodies of Pairote and the other passengers.

Two days later, on December 29, Police Maj. Gen. Polsak Banjongsiri, commander of Sakon Nakhon provincial command, told the media that the police had found 198 pills of methamphetamine wrapped in a black plastic bag hidden in Pairote’s boxer trunks when police examined his body in the morgue. He also said that police in this operation had opened fire in self-defense.

The Saengrit family filed a complaint with the parliamentary Police Affairs Committee on January 11, asking for an inquiry into the matter. On March 14, the committee concluded that the Sakon Nakhon provincial command anti-drug squad under the command of Police Lt. Col. Veerawuth Siangsai used lethal force unnecessarily and excessively in the shooting death of Pairote. The committee found no evidence to justify the claim made by the officers that they were acting in self-defense because

Pairote and other passengers in his car neither had weapons nor took any life-threatening action against the police.

In addition, the committee concluded that a bag of methamphetamine had been planted on Pairote's body after his death. The committee cited statements by medical personnel at the hospital, who thoroughly searched Pairote's body twice, including removing his clothes, and did not find any drugs. It said that the police produced the bag containing 198 pills, saying they had found it on Pairote's body, only after they entered the morgue and ordered everyone else outside.

"The parliamentary committee's findings are both brave and virtually unprecedented because the committee directly accuses a police anti-drug squad of an illegal killing," Adams said. "Unfortunately, this is not a unique incident but exemplifies a broad pattern of police brutality that has gone unchecked for many years. The question now is whether the government will show political courage to ensure the prosecution of those responsible for the killing."

The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials provide that whenever the use of force is unavoidable, law enforcement officers must act in proportion to the seriousness of the offense with the objective of minimizing damage and injury. However, Thai police have a long history of using excessive and unnecessary lethal force against criminal suspects, particularly suspected drug traffickers and users. Human Rights Watch [documented](#) extrajudicial killings and other serious human rights violations in the context of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's "war on drugs" in 2003 and 2004. Many of those killed had been previously blacklisted by police as suspected drug traffickers.

The 2007 Independent Committee for the Investigation, Study and Analysis of the Formation and Implementation of Drug Suppression Policy (ICID), chaired by former attorney general Kanit na Nakhon, concluded that the Thaksin government formulated and implemented the "war on drugs" without respect for human rights or due process of law. The committee found that 2,819 people were killed during the government's anti-drug campaign between February and April 2003. However, successive governments have failed to conduct a criminal inquiry into the killings reported by the committee. The current government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's younger sister, has publicly and repeatedly refused to blame Thaksin for the killings and other human rights abuses committed during the 2003 "war on drugs" campaign.

"Prime Minister Yingluck needs to ensure that the current anti-drug campaign does not lead Thailand back to the dark era of Thaksin's brutal 'war on drugs,'" Adams said. "Only by holding those responsible for the killing in Sakon Nakhon, and opening serious investigations into other killings during the 2003 anti-drug campaign, will the government show it is serious about upholding the rule of law."