

For immediate release  
August 8, 2014

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## **Case Against Labour Rights Defender Draws International Outcry** *Nearly 100 international rights groups demand industry action*

Today (8 August), nearly 100 international and national labor and human rights groups and NGOs sent a joint-letter to members of the Thai Pineapple Industry Association (TPIA), calling on them to urge TPIA member Natural Fruit to drop the criminal and civil charges it leveled against researcher and labor rights activist Andy Hall.

Signatories to the letter include representatives of more than 20 countries, as well as global organizations including the International Trade Union Confederation, European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ) and Human Rights Watch. The letter requests the removal of Mr. Wirat Piyapornpaiboon, CEO of Natural Fruit as TIPA president and the revocation of Natural Fruit's membership in TPIA if it refuses to drop the case.

Natural Fruit filed its first criminal defamation charge against Hall in February 2013 after he contributed to a report by a Finnish NGO, Finnwatch, which reported serious rights abuses at its factory in Prachuap Khiri Khan province. The report, 'Cheap Has a High Price', utilized worker interviews to document rights violations including the use of child labor, violations of Thailand's minimum wage standards, the confiscation of migrant workers' travel and work documents, and the failure to provide legally mandated paid sick days, holidays and leave.

Hall, a British citizen, faces three criminal defamation charges, one civil defamation action, and two criminal charges under the Computer Crimes Act brought by Natural Fruit that could result in up to seven years in prison on each count and about \$9.5 million in damages. The trial is scheduled to begin in September 2014. The case against Hall has drawn widespread attention from the international labour and human rights community, as well as international media.

"Harassment of activists like Andy Hall, who stand up for the rights of workers, is an unacceptable assault on labor rights and freedom of speech," said Abby McGill, campaigns director for the International Labor Rights Forum. "These charges, which were cited in Thailand's recent downgrade in the State Department's 2014 Trafficking in Person's (TIP) report, demonstrate how the Thai government and industry work together to silence criticism and cover up migrant worker exploitation, rather than deal with the systemic problems that allow it to continue."

Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of the British Trades Union Congress, representing 6 million workers in Andy Hall's home country, said: "Vulnerable workers need people like Andy Hall – working with trade unions in Thailand and internationally – to stand up against exploitation and abuse. We need to

be free from harassment and victimization so we can protect working people from corporate greed and government inaction. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us.'”

"We are the workers, we are united. We will strongly defend for the rights of our migrant brothers and sisters and those who work for the workers' rights," said Komsan Tongsir, General Secretary of State Enterprises Worker's Relations Confederation (SERC), Thailand,

The case comes at a time when Thailand has come under mounting pressure to address its labour and human rights situation, highlighted – on the international stage – by the US governments' Trafficking In Persons (TIP) report, which downgraded the country's rating to 'Tier 3'; the lowest possible rating.

For a copy of the letter, and more information on actions taken by TPIA in response, please visit: <http://business-humanrights.org/en/appeal-to-thai-pineapple-industry-association-urge-natural-fruit-to-drop-cases-against-researcher-activist-andy-hall>.

For more on the case against Andy Hall, please visit: [www.andyjhall.wordpress.com](http://www.andyjhall.wordpress.com) .

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