

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-Ocha  
Office of the Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister Office  
Government House, 1 Pissanulok Road  
Dusit, Bangkok 10300, Thailand

cc *Minister of Foreign Affairs*  
*Minister of Justice*  
*UNHCR Regional Office*  
*UNHCR Thailand*

**Open Letter to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-Ocha: Release Refugee Hakeem Al-Araibi and Allow Him Safe Passage to Australia**

Dear Prime Minister Prayut Chan-Ocha,

I am writing to you from the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), a network of 350 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees across the Asia Pacific region. As a network solely devoted to refugee rights protection, APRRN strongly urges the Royal Thai Government to safeguard Hakeem Al-Araibi's fundamental rights to liberty and security. As a recognised refugee in Australia, Mr. Hakeem Al-Araibi should be allowed to immediately return to Australia where he has held permanent residence status since 2017. He should not be forcibly returned to Bahrain, a country from which he has escaped persecution and fears return.

Mr. Al-Araibi, a Bahraini footballer, was detained by Thai Immigration officials on 27 November after arriving on a flight from Australia. Upon disembarking at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, Mr. Al-Araibi was arrested by Thai Immigration Police. It has come to light that this arrest was on the basis of an Interpol "Red Notice" issued at Bahrain's request. We understand that this Interpol notice has now been lifted. According to Bahraini court documents, Hakeem Al-Araibi was charged with vandalising a police station and was sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison in 2014. This charge is vehemently denied.


Prior to fleeing Bahrain, Al-Araibi reportedly suffered torture and other forms of mistreatment at the hands of Bahraini authorities whilst in detention. These horrific acts by government actors were allegedly inflicted in response to his brother's political activities during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. In addition, since his arrival in Australia, the footballer faced further threats to his security as a result of his public criticism of the current President of the Asian Football Federation, a cousin of the King of Bahrain Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

Despite Thailand not being a signatory to the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, under customary international law the Thai Government is bound by the universal principle of non-refoulement. This principle prohibits the return of a person to a country where they may be at risk of torture or persecution. It is also underscored in the 1984 *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, to which Thailand has obliged itself. Most recently, at the 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees, the Royal Thai Government again highlighted their unwavering commitment to this principle.

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network and our members from across the region are deeply concerned that Mr. Al-Araibi has been detained and prevented from returning to Australia. Instead, he has been held in detention whilst the Thai government considers Bahrain's farcical request for his return. It is common knowledge that Interpol Red Notices are subject to abuse and have been used strategically by countries such as China, Russia and Bahrain to quash political dissent and to curb freedom of speech. The arrest and subsequent detention of Mr. Al-Araibi is an obvious case of the Interpol system being exploited specifically for the purpose of having Mr. Al-Araibi returned to Bahrain.

APRRN is aware that Mr. Al-Araibi has recently been moved to Bangkok's Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre. On behalf of APRRN's 350 members and the family of Mr. Al-Araibi, we urge you to do everything in your power to halt the *refoulement* of Mr. Al-Araibi to Bahrain and to allow him to return to Australia immediately.

Your sincerely,



Yiombi Thona

**Chair**

**Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network**

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