

## Thai lawyer petitions court for release of detained Uyghurs

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Thai lawyer Chuchart Kanpai speaks to reporters outside a Bangkok court where he filed a petition seeking the release of 42 Uyghurs detained for more than a decade, on January 30. (Pimuk Rakkanam/RFA)

A Thai lawyer is seeking the release of 42 Uyghurs who have spent more than a decade in detention and who rights groups fear could be deported to China where they would be at risk of torture.

The men from the mostly Muslim minority from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China have been held on immigration charges at a Thai detention center since attempting to escape Beijing's persecution through Thailand.

Lawyer Chuchart Kanpai said in a petition submitted to a court on Thursday that the men had spent enough time locked up and should be freed.

“They have been jailed from 2013 to 2025, more than 10 years. It is obvious that they have completed the sentence,” Chuchart said in the petition, according to a copy obtained by Radio Free Asia.

“Detention is therefore unlawful.”

The rights group Justice for All said early this month that reports from 48 detained Uyghur asylum seekers indicated that Thai authorities were coercing them to fill out forms in preparation for their deportation to China.

It was not immediately clear why the rights group referred to 48 detained Uyghurs but Chuchart identified 42 in his petition.

A government spokesman said on January 23 that Thailand had [“no policy”](#) to deport the Uyghurs and he dismissed speculation that they would be forced back to China.

Uyghurs in China’s vast Xinjiang region have been subjected to widespread human rights abuses, including detention in massive concentration camps. China denies that but [UN experts](#) on January 21 also urged Thailand not to deport the Uyghurs saying they would likely face torture.

Chuchart, after lodging the petition, said the court would hold a hearing on February 17.

“We will have witnesses including the ones from the World Uyghur Congress,” Chuchart told reporters, referring to an advocacy group that this month appealed to Thailand not to send the men to China. —Radio Free Asia

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