

## **70 Uyghurs under threat of deportation to China on a hunger strike**

By Willy Fautré from Bangkok

HRWF (07.06.2016) - More than 70 Uyghurs locked up in the Thai Immigration Police detention centre are on a hunger strike to appeal for help and raise awareness about their situation; they face the threat of being sent back to China where they could be prosecuted for fleeing the country. At the detention centre, they were separated from their wives and children, parents and siblings. "We are not criminals," they said.

The detainees said they would rather die in Thailand than go back to China where they face torture and death, or would be sentenced to life in prison.

Last year, the military regime of Thailand surprised the international community with its decision to hand over 109 Uyghurs to Chinese authorities. China then promised Thailand that the Uyghurs would be treated humanely, but pictures of them being hooded and dragged from the transport plane suggested otherwise.

When local reporters confronted Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha about the deportation, the junta chief shot back and asked "Do you want us to keep them for ages until they have children for three generations?"

For the Uyghurs, Thailand is simply a transit point to Turkey, where Erdogan said they would be welcome.

In recent decades, Thailand has permitted many people to enter and stay in the country: anti-communist Lao fighters, Khmer Rouge leaders, various anti-Burmese ethnic armies (Shan, Karen, Mon...), as well as the now defunct Tamil Tigers. Thailand has a lot of experience with different groups seeking refuge on its soil. Therefore, there is no need to bend over backwards to please the Chinese.