

# Appeal for website closure protest: Midnight University (Chiang Mai)

Sunday 1 October 2006, by [BAMFORD Chanida](#), [Focus on the Global South](#), [Midnight University](#) (Date first published: 30 September 2006).

Dear Friends,

Midnight University, a program of popular education based at Chiang Mai University in Northern Thailand, is appealing for support from university and media colleagues and activists all over the world to oppose the closure of its website on September 29, 2006, by the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology by order of the leaders of the military coup in Thailand.

[www.midnightuniv.org](http://www.midnightuniv.org) is visited by over 2.5 million users per month. The closure means the loss of access to over 20,000 pages of 1,500 or so papers and articles in the fields of Science, Social Science, and Humanities, including 1,300 items on the Bulletin Board. This major encroachment on academic freedom and curtailment of freedom of information of a great number of the Thai population cannot be tolerated. See the statement below for more details.

To denounce the website closure, please send your full name to [midnightuniv@gmail.com](mailto:midnightuniv@gmail.com), attention: Mr Somkiat Tangnamo, Webmaster.

Thank you,

Chanida

Focus on the Global South

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## Statement of the Midnight University

### “Opposing the Closure of Channels of Free Communication”

Beginning on Friday September 29<sup>th</sup>, the Midnight University’s website has been blocked by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Thailand. However, ours was not the first one to be blocked or tampered with by the power of the Coup Council. The Midnight University’s considered reaction to the September 19<sup>th</sup> coup is strong disapproval of such a reckless solution to the nation’s political problems. Nonetheless, we also realize that it is too late to reverse it and the only way out is to lend a hand in pushing our country back onto the path of democratic development.

The Council for Democratic Reform (CDR) has claimed that this coup is the beginning of a political reform process which includes the drafting of a new constitution. And yet, the provisions concerning the drafting of a new constitution and political reform in the Provisional Constitution of the CDR do not allow the full and free exercise of political rights and civil liberties by the people, which is the key condition for a successful political reform. Popular participation does not simply mean being selected to sit in a constituent assembly, but also denotes the opportunity for mutual learning and free exchange of ideas. Therefore, an atmosphere of subjection and control by the military under the CDR will rule out any possibility of genuine political reform.

For that reason, the Midnight University held a press conference on September 28<sup>th</sup>, to oppose the political reform process as stipulated in the Provisional Constitution and propose an alternative that would allow for the full restitution of rights and liberties to the people. To get our point across, we performed a symbolic act of tearing up copies of the Provisional Constitution and posted a report of the said event on the Midnight University's website.

Hence, the ICT's immediate imposition of a blockage on our website.

Actually, it is not hard for the Midnight University to overcome this technical difficulty. We have indeed received various offers from foreign servers to host our website. Be that as it may, we are of the opinion that the problem of availability of a public space is not technical in nature, but essentially political. And it has arisen because the self-proclaimed "Council for Democratic Reform" has used its coup-begotten power to impose a blockage on public space. Therefore, we need to fight this illegitimate power together right here in this land rather than evade it and find a new public space elsewhere.

As the Midnight University has earlier warned, political reform couldn't be realized in an atmosphere shorn of people's rights and liberties. That the Coup Council has thoughtlessly closed down websites that expressed dissenting views on the coup shows that it is incapable of leading a political reform that is free and equally open to all. To bring this power to an end peacefully, Thai society must not submit to it. Instead, we should together pressure it to stop the violation of people's rights and liberties at once.

It is true that, given freedom, there will be some who would exploit it to try to destroy or disrupt political reform. And yet, only the full exercise of rights and liberties can enlighten and empower a society to fight the lies and half-truths of corrupt politicians seeking a return to power. On the contrary, a society whose learning and communication is kept under tutelage will remain weak and unable to resist them.

In place of an arbitrary and selective censorship based on a subjective feeling of distrust and animosity of the censors, the complete and indiscriminate opening of all channels of communication will result in a free, fair and predictable rule of the game for all, thus rectifying the

arbitrary, unchecked and uncontrolled exercise of power that is a major weakness of all coup-makers. By guaranteeing the equal rights and liberties of the people to information, the Coup Council will be able to tap into the real source of power far greater than whatever it can get from its illegitimate coup.

30 September 2006