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## Woman Convicted of Filing False Rape Charge Against Former Minister



*Phakkapon Santalunai (R) arriving at court this morning, where she was sentenced to 3 years in prison for filing a false rape charge against a former Cabinet minister.*

BANGKOK — Thailand's Supreme Court has sentenced a state employee to three years in prison for filing a false rape charge against a former Cabinet member.

The case dates back to 2003 when Phakkapon Santalunai, an employee at the Trat Provincial Department of Public Work and City Planning, told police that she was raped in a hotel room in Bangkok's Pradipat district by Sombat Uthaisang, who served as Deputy Minister of Transport from 1995-1996 and Deputy Minister of Interior Affairs from 2001-2005.

Sombat disputed the charge and told the press that the sex was consensual. The Minister alleged that Phakkapon was accusing him of rape because he would not pay her 1 million baht in "silence money."

Lower courts acquitted Sombat of the rape charges, and found Phakkapon guilty of filing a false report with police. The Supreme Court upheld that decision today.

"Mr. Sombat was 67 year old at the time. Although Ms. Phakkapon was smaller in physical build, she could resist, struggle, or call for help," the verdict reads. "Yet Ms. Phakkapon did not such things. The staff at the hotel also testified that they did not hear any call for help."

Citing the "horrendous" nature of her crime, judges sentenced Phakkapon to three years in prison. She is also required to pay a damage fee of 1 million baht to the former Minister, and publish a summary of the verdict in four newspapers for 10 days.

There was no immediate reaction from Phakkapon or Sombat at the time this article was published. However, Phakkapon insisted to Manager ASTV yesterday that she was a victim of sexual assault.

"I would like to tell other women who fell prey to sexual harassment: don't be afraid. Stand up and straight. Don't let anyone take advantage of you," Phakkapon was quoted as saying by Manager ASTV.

"I have been pressured by society and my workplace while I have been fighting for truth in the last 12 years," she said. "Women must not give up. You must have faith that justice system will eventually prove the truth."

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