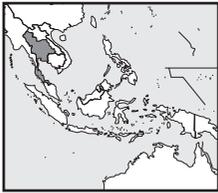


## THAILAND

# Without human security there can be no social security



Resolution of the escalating violence in the southern provinces of the country is the first step in addressing the issue of social security. Without human security, social security will always take second place. Reconciliation between different religious and cultural groups is necessary in the journey towards social security for all Thais regardless of race, culture, religion or gender.

The Social Agenda Working Group  
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The policies of Thaksin Shinawatra's administration from 2001 to 2006 contributed to the recurrent and escalating violence in Thailand's three southern border provinces, known for their sensitive cultural, religious and racial context. Although the Thaksin government was ousted by the 19 September 2006 coup the authoritarian mentality, particularly among the military and police, remains. The civil society sector must create the political space needed to protect lives and bring about social justice.

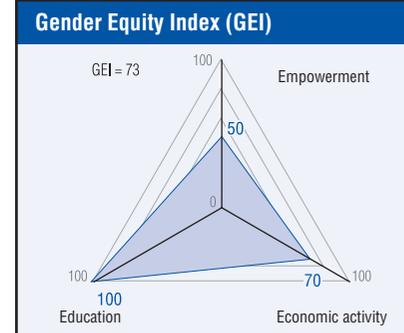
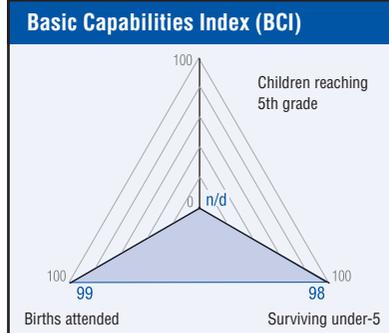
This report describes the spread of authoritarianism, which disregards international rules and regulations and destroys domestic social security. Violent responses to conflict have led to the closure of true political space that could alleviate the dispute. A case in point is the violence taking place in Thailand's three southern border provinces. This structural violence requires collaborative action on the part of civil society and the general population in order to achieve human security in these provinces and the country overall.

### Authoritarian democracy

A variety of increasingly recognized international standards, treaties, commitments, statements and global forum policies is a new phenomenon in the international community. These standard commitments on human rights, international economic relationships and environmental protection are interrelated. Although these agreements may be internationally recognized, it is difficult for a country to turn such commitments into legally binding laws.

There are numerous political and economic hurdles inhibiting the transformation of these commitments into law, and as a result, these international standards and commitments have become 'soft laws' (Cassese, 2005). Additionally, with the world overshadowed by growing violence brought on by the threat of terrorism and war on terrorism, the once great potential for these 'soft laws' and other treaties to become international standards has been greatly weakened (Satha-Anand, 2005).

Today's context of growing global violence has created a distinct political reality. The wars and violence encountered by democratic societies at the beginning of the 21st century are made different by two factors. First, terrorism and the war on terrorism



undermine the basis of political society, whose sense of certainty is guaranteed by a state's normal operation and the protection of citizens' lives. Secondly, without normality in political society, wider society regresses from a sorrowful society victimized by violent tragedy to a society eager and willing to use violence to relieve its sorrow (Satha-Anand, 2002). In this state of fear political solutions fade into the background and the rights of ordinary people are abandoned while civil society groups are gagged.

Violent reactions from the state, ordinary people's terror and continued vigilance help spread authoritarianism. This is even the case when the government is elected by the majority of voters, known as a democratic administration. The loss of human security can lead to internal and external interest groups taking advantage of the situation and seeking profit from it.

### Violence on the southern border

The violent situation in the southern border provinces began in 1948, eventually dying down before heating up again in recent years. Forty-three violent incidents took place between November 2002 and April 2003. Most of these incidents were ambushes and occurred mostly in the Narathiwat provinces. On 31 occasions the violence targeted government buildings and officials, injuring 34 and killing 30 people. Between January and 15 July 2002, there were 32 explosions, extortions and killings of state officials, which took the lives of 19 police officers. This violence was more intense than in 2001, while the situation grew worse in 2003.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Personal contact with the authorities and based on an article in *Matichon Daily* (2002).

The violence taking place in the region between 2004 and 2006 can be broken down as follows: in 2004, 1,850 violent incidents took place while 2,297 and 1,622 incidents (the incidents in December were not included) occurred in 2005 and 2006, respectively. Of these three years, the highest number of incidents occurred in 2005. When considering injuries and deaths during the three-year period, more people were injured and killed in the southern violence in 2006 than in 2004 and 2005. Approximately 1,699 people were injured and killed in 2006; 1,643 in 2005; and 1,438 in 2004. The most recent violence saw a rise in the number of bombings rather than arson attacks which were previously used.

Data indicates that the public continues to be on the priority list of targets for these violent incidents. Considering that the conflict is a political fight for the southern region's identity, one would assume that the state and its officials would be the natural targets, as a symbolic resistance to state authority. Instead the actual targets are ordinary Buddhist and Muslim people, making the violence terrifying for both communities (Chitphiromsri, n.d.).

### Working for peace

The Social Agenda Working Group (SAWG) started monitoring disturbances in the three southern provinces in early 2004 when it cooperated with the Foundation for Peace and Culture to organize a Peace Project for the Iraqi Children and held a forum on "Peace talk by ordinary people".

Then, in June 2004, SAWG participated in a group study on the alleviation of violence. The group, consisting of the Women's Network for Progress and Peace, the Local Eco-cultural Network, the Inter-university Cooperation Network and the Group's

Secretariat of Chulalongkorn University's Social Research Institute, discussed the situation and arrived at the following conclusions:

- Thai society has trouble with cultural diversity and different ideologies. It is necessary to understand the complexity of the problems. Universities and educational institutes should play an active role in promoting knowledge and understanding so that people can be free from the polarity between Buddhists and Muslims.
- Thai society does not understand the three southern border provinces adequately. The social and cultural settings of these provinces are drastically and violently changing. At the core of the problems is the fact that society does not pay enough attention to the local people, and their different cultures and religions. Neither can society distinguish the urban and rural communities or appreciate the relationship between the rural Muslim majority and the urban population. It cannot see the internal relations and disputes between different generations. Nor can it see how the traditional structure underpinning Muslim communities has been replaced by external social structures and how the local culture and resources have been invaded by outsiders.
- Due to this lack of understanding, Thai society attempted to explain the problems in two ways. One group tried to present basic facts of who was doing what, where, when, and how, while the other attempted to describe the reality and answer the question 'why?'. These two groups must collaboratively analyze the different understandings of the situation to reach a solution for all parties.

### Social and cultural approaches

To mitigate the problems and create peaceful well-being in the three southern provinces SAWG focuses on:

- Building a horizontal relationship between people through collaborative activities with local communities so that 'people can get to know each other' more and become less prejudiced with the hope that this could contribute to their peaceful coexistence.
- Providing alternative solutions by allowing the majority of people to participate and voice their wider, deeper and diverse perspectives in order to seek and learn a new way of thinking and understanding of individuals' ideological pursuits. No instant success formula is available for these complex problems related to distrust and the pursuit of violence.
- Communicating with wider Thai society is essential because external factors such as decision-making process, authorities' authoritarian culture, public policy processes and biased reporting in the media have contributed to these problems. More space should be given to different thinking, opinions and assumptions to create joint social learning and urge the public to participate in tackling the problems of the three southern provinces in a peaceful manner.

### Family, community and human security

SAWG has also organized local forums in order to include local peoples' needs in the future human security policy framework, with some of the learning from these forums presented below.

When asked, villagers said human security starts first in the family, in the form of family security, in a situation where parents and children take care of each other. They said they attempted to strengthen their family bonds and gain their children's trust by inviting *Toh khru* (an Islamic teacher) to perform their Muslim daily prayer at home and tell stories of the past to the children to build up their morality. This cultural tradition should be maintained and promoted to help consolidate security of the family and relatives.

To the villagers, community tradition and culture serve as protection for their community's security. They understand that if they let their traditions collapse, they will never see the next world, which is very important to Muslims.

Life security was considered to be the same as spiritual security, which is sustained by Islam and the *pondok* schooling system. The ability to constantly and properly conduct one's life according to Islamic teachings and devoutly follow Muslim tradition contributes to an individual's spiritual security as well as community unity.

Local security, the villagers pointed out, depends on resource base security, whereby the sea, peat swamps, rivers, rice fields, forests and mountains provide them with plenty of food. Security can be realized when resource management is aligned with local ecosystems and takes into account the villagers' culture. Conflict over resources between the state and the private sector on one side and the villagers on the other is threatening the local way of life.

As for the unrest in the three southern provinces, villagers indicated that the authorities, the government and media were not trustworthy. They alleged that government officials collaborated in filing charges against innocent people, which brought fear and insecurity to the villagers.

According to the villagers, the government regards security only as the maintenance of order and use of military forces to control the situation. For the villagers, human security also means having adequate food to eat and a restful sleep at night, and their families, relatives and local communities having these things as well.

### Reporting on Reconciliation

The National Reconciliation Commission (NRC),<sup>2</sup> submitted its report to the government in June 2006. It proposed that a solution to the violence start with an acceptance that cultural diversity and differences do exist in Thai society. It suggested listening to the voices of the marginalized or minority groups.

2 The NRC was a commission set up by the Thaksin administration in March 2005 to find a solution to the problems of the three southern border provinces. After submitting its report to the government, NRC ended its activity in June 2006.

Consequently, in the southern border provinces, the 'voice' of Buddhist Thais is important and should be considered by the local majority Muslim community. Similarly, the Buddhist majority ought to pay attention to the 'voice' of the Muslim Malays. When the entire country listens to the voice of the suffering minority people, both the state and public can collectively find ways to alleviate the violence suffered by everyone.

The NRC's approach to tackling violence focuses on human security and non-violence. This means the essential use of political and development measures, not suppression. An inter-religious discussion process is important to promote mutual understanding among religious adherents, and in order to treat current wounds so that they can finally heal. This NRC proposal is a policy attempt to fight authoritarianism that uses violence to address problems (NRC, 2006).

A single measure is not enough to alleviate the structural violence. In particular, the military measure that uses violence to suppress violence will force ordinary people to deal with a situation they have not created. SAWG recommends that the major mission of the people and civil society sectors be to open up political space. This space will allow non-violence to play an active role in solving the conflict and structural violence in the three southern border provinces, which will benefit ordinary people, whether they be Buddhist, Muslim Thai, or Muslim Malay. ■

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