

Developments in the Southern Provinces of Thailand

Overall Situation

The Situation in the three southern most provinces of Thailand, Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, remains a concern for the Thai Government as violent incidents continue to occur with militants targeting both innocent Muslim and Buddhist civilians. Since 2004, the death toll in the three southern provinces is approximately 1008 and figures of those injured being around 1812 – with victims being nearly equal among both Thai Muslims and Thai Buddhists. It has also been noted that there has been an increase in militants targeting innocent civilians. Recently, in one of the most vicious attacks, two female teachers were abducted and brutally beaten – leaving one hospitalized and in serious condition.

As noted in the Joint Press Statement between H.E. Sayed K. El-Masry, head of the OIC Goodwill delegation to Thailand, and Mr. Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, that situation in the southern provinces of Thailand is not a religious conflict. But instead is a situation in which religion has been used as a pretext for violence. Religion has been distorted by those who are taking advantage of the socio-economic problems in the three southern provinces to stir unrest for their own political interest.

Efforts of the government are not only seeking to end the violence, but also to put in place long-term solutions that will promote harmony and overall development for the benefit of the local population, regardless of belief or ethnicity. The Thai Government understands the root causes of the problem and is fully committed to addressing the situation in a long-term and comprehensive manner. The Government has, thus, initiated a number of measures that will improve the educational system and stimulate economic growth in the region.

At the same time, it also recognizes the distinctiveness of the region and gives emphasis to the promotion of greater understanding among government officials and local residents that will enhance confidence building and enable a harmonious society. With this recognition, the Government has given priority to assigning competent officials, who are sensitized to the unique characteristics of the region, to work in the three southern provinces as well as initiated a number of cultural awareness programs.

With regards to the tragic Krue Se and Tak Bai incidents, Thailand also reaffirms our commitment to undertake comprehensive measure to prevent a reoccurrence of such incidents by equipping our security personnel with adequate trainings and skills to handle crowd control based on international standards.

To ensure the successful implementation of these measures in enabling sustainable and long-term progress, the Thai government will continue to push forward and build upon the success of these past initiatives.

Socio-Economic Measures

Among the three southern provinces of Thailand's combined population of 1.7 million, its poverty rate is approximately 17 percent with unemployment rate high. The Thai Government recognizes this problem and gives high priority to the situation in the southern provinces of Thailand, and has thus, initiated a number of programs that will address the root causes of the socio-economic problem as a

means to reiterate our commitment to peacefully resolving the situation in a comprehensive manner.

In the past few years, the Thai Government intensified efforts by launching a number of initiatives focused on addressing the educational system, training for security personnel; developing the economy for the local community; improving the transportation system; and enhancing cultural awareness as follows:

- Educational Initiatives:

The Thai Government, through the Ministry of Education, is playing a greater role in implementing measures to develop the southern provinces of Thailand.

- The educational system is being re-designed to become more compatible to the demands of the labor force;
- At the same time, it is also taking into account the distinctiveness of the local community by promoting Islamic studies at state primary schools as well as encouraging local schools to teach Malay and the region's history. Over hundreds of "ponoh" (293) have also registered to be eligible for Government assistance;
- Hundreds of scholarships have been also granted to students in the southern provinces;
- As a national policy to promote greater understanding and unity within the country, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also organized a summer training course and study tour for 20 Thai Muslim students from Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala and Songkhla during 8-26 May 2006, which enabled them to receive first-hands on work experience at various departments within the foreign ministry.

- Economic Initiatives:

The Thai Government is addressing the economic concerns of the southern provinces of Thailand in long-term and comprehensive manner. In addition to the vocational trainings available at the various training centers located through the three southern provinces, other initiatives include:

- Promoting the halal food industry to enhance job opportunities and stimulate economic growth in the south;
- Providing financial assistance and tax incentives to attract investments;
- Ensuring that financial services provided be in accordance with the Islamic principles;
- Providing assistance in developing local products and enhancing its market accessibility;
- Providing low interest rates to expand the economy; and
- Improving the transportation system to enhance the flow of goods and services.

As a result, tens of thousands have already undergone the vocational trainings and received employment both in public and private sectors throughout the southern provinces. Businesses have also be stimulated with commercial investments flowing into Yala creating greater job opportunities for the local communities.

Remedial and Security Measures:

In addition to the remedial measures given to families affected by the Krue Se and Tak Bai incidents, the Government will push forward to give assistance to those who have suffered as well as expedite and review pending issues and petitions in accordance to the due process and the law. With this recognition, constructive and comprehensive measures have been implemented to reaffirm its commitment to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

- Remedial Measures
 - Pursuant to the Office of the Prime Minister's Order No. 9/2548, dated 6 January B.E. 2548 (2005), a Remedial Commission for persons who have suffered from the Tak Bai incident was established to provide necessary assistance and remedy for the families of the deceased. The injured, and missing persons as well as verify the damages and losses.
 - Remedies have been made in various forms, regardless of the investigation result, to those who were affected, such as financial assistance of up to 300,000 baht per person, free education as well as social assistance to enable the affected families to continue their daily lives and living.

- Trainings for Security Personnel:
 - In addressing the lessons learnt from the tragic Krue Se and Tak Bai incidents the Thai Government provided trainings as well as better facilities to equip its security personnel with means to handle crowd control situations in accordance with international standards and practices;
 - 1) Every military officer stationed in the three southern provinces of Thailand must received training on effective crowd control handling and negotiations in accordance with the standards used during UN peacekeeping operations in East Timor;
 - 2) A special "Riot Control Company" was set up to handle crowd control – using only shields and batons for protection and no firearms permitted. There are two units thus far – one stationed in the south and other – its reinforcement unit, is located in Bangkok.
 - 3) The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials was also translated and disseminated as a training manual to all relevant agencies;
 - 4) The Southern Border Provinces Peace building Command also conducts an evaluation of its personnel's overall performance periodically (3 to 6 months) to ensure efficiency in resolving the situation in the south in a peaceful manner;
 - 5) A number of cultural awareness trainings and language course have been organized for security personnel working in the southern provinces of Thailand to enhance understanding among the local community;
 - 6) The Ministry of Defense and its Supreme Command Headquarters have periodically organized human rights seminars, in conjunction with international military offices. (i.e. In May 2005, a seminar on human rights and laws governing conflicts of firearms)

7) The Royal Thai Police also gives high priority on the prevention of human rights violations by police officers. It issued a human rights handbook and organized education and training programs for police officers on human rights issues. (i.e. Training for police officers in the south by the Foundation for Human Rights and Development in Yala)

- Others
 - The cabinet approved the establishment of the independent Commission on Justice and Civil Liberties for the Southern Border Provinces (ICJC). ICJC is chaired by former Parliament President, Mr. Ukrit Mongkolnawin, and set up to provide legal advice to the Government on implementing effective, just and transparent legal measure in the south in accordance to the distinctiveness of the community.

National Reconciliation Commission

- NRC Report
 - The National Reconciliation Commission was established on 28 March 2005 and headed by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun as an initiative to by the Thai Government to promote reconciliation in the southern provinces of Thailand.
 - NRC, which comprises representatives from civil societies, academics, Muslim leaders, government and military official, was given a free rein to analyze the situation and made recommendations to the Government – advising on suggested long-term measures.
 - The NRC submitted their report to the government on 5 June 2006. A press conference was given at the Foreign Ministry by the head of the NRC, who disclosed the following about the report:
 - 1) Reaffirmed that the situation in the southern province is neither a religious conflict nor separatism.
 - 2) Concluded that the root causes of the problem in the southern provinces were poverty, lack of development, cultural differences as well as the failure of the justice system.
 - 3) Proposed that the state clearly demonstrate that it chooses to engage in dialogue with the militants; resolving the problems of unemployment; improving the justice system; and using “Yawi” as a working language to reduce the communication barriers between the local communities and authorities.
 - The government is reviewing the proposals made by the NRC.

Royal Thai Consulate-General
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
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