

“Insiders” presented policy paper to support peace process in southern Thailand

Pattani – “Insiders” presented a “policy paper” to help strengthen the peace dialogue between the Thai government and the Patani Malay movement and to increase people’s participation in quelling the southern violence.

Ahmad Somboon Bualuang, a representative of the “Insider Peacebuilders Platform – IPP”, spoke at a press conference on 28 February 2014 held as part of the “Peace Media Festival in Southern Thailand/Patani” organized by the Network of Civil Society in Southern Thailand at Prince of Songkhla University’s Faculty of Communication Science. The 18-page-long policy paper entitled “How can the peace process be taken forward?” is a result of the six-month-long discussion of the IPP forum, which was created to help increase the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the peace process in southern Thailand.

The IPP forum, conducted over two years, is a cooperation between civil society groups and academic institutions long working on peace and conflict. Participants comprise state officials and members of the civil society, such as human rights advocates, Malay Patani non-violent activists, NGOs working on healing and reparation for victims of violence, Buddhists and Chinese, the media and those representing voice of the Thai government and Patani Malay movement. This policy paper is made available in Thai, English and Malay.

The signing of the “General Consensus on Peace Dialogue Process” on 28 February 2013 is an important turning point of effort to resolve conflict in the Deep South. The document analyses the one-year Malaysia-facilitated peace dialogue between the Thai representatives headed by



PEACE MEDIA DAY

PPP101: Pa(t)ani Peace Process

10 ปีความรุนแรง, 1 ปี สันติภาพชายแดนใต้/ปาตานี
27-28 FEB 2014 @Comm-Sci PSU Pattani

the National Security Council and the Malay Patani movement led by the BRN.

The IPP identifies seven assets of the peace dialogue: 1) a significant number of leaders of the Patani Malay movement are supportive of the peace dialogue 2) the involvement of Malaysia as a facilitator could help push the peace dialogue forward 3) the flexibility of the composition of the dialoguing partners make it possible to accommodate other groups and stakeholders in the future 4) BRN representatives have demonstrated that they could communicate with the leadership council, known as Dewan Pimmipan Parti (DPP) and have significant command and control over the militants on the ground 5) the area for discussion has been widened and taboo issues, such as autonomy or merdeka (independence) could be discussed publicly 6) the reduction of violence during the Ramadan is the first attempt at publicly-announced de-escalation 7) both dialoguing parties have the willingness to push the peace dialogue forward, despite several obstacles.

The policy paper also highlights nine shortcomings: 1) there is still doubt if the panels really represent all the important power holders and whether they could ensure that any decision would be successfully implemented. 2) both sides have differing understanding on how to resolve the conflict; the government side understood the peace dialogue first and foremost as an effort to terminate violent incidents, the Patani-Malay movement emphasized primarily the need to acknowledge the deeper historical and political roots of the conflict and to develop an agenda for a political transformation. 3) both sides express frustrations with the way the other side communicated their interpretation of the peace talks to their audiences and in the public arena. The Thai government was shocked when the BRN came out with strong demands on YouTube, while the BRN was disturbed that details from the closed door meetings were mentioned in public. 4) so far, the peace process is a rather narrow engagement comprising only a very few representatives 5) the attitude of the public and the media are largely unfavorable to the peace process 6) the Thai mainstream public and the media shared

scepticism about the prospects of the peace process 7) a large number of the minority Thai Buddhist and Thai-Chinese populations in the Deep South are worried about the outcome of the peace process 8) peace constituencies on both sides of the divide are rather weak 9) it is still unclear how could a genuine compromise which takes into account the interests, needs and fears of all stakeholders and parties, will look like.

The IPP also analyses and makes suggestions on how to deal with several challenges of the peace process by looking at experiences of other conflict zones. The lesson from other peace processes shows that the more inclusive the process is, the more promising and the more legitimacy the participating parties can claim vis-à-vis their constituencies. As for the role of third party, it makes more sense to discuss on the Term of Reference acceptable to both sides rather than focusing on whether to call it a “facilitator” or “mediator” – both often have overlapping role. The creation of a sound multi-track peace process will give voice to the people on the ground to express their expectations and concerns over the peace process. Lessons from other conflict areas also tell us that whenever parties faced with stalemates, “non-negotiable” issues, it is advisable to take a step back and focus on how to improve the process instead of getting stuck on one substantive issue. The issue of restorative justice i.e. the effort to address the needs of the victims of violence and injustices by seeking truths, acknowledging their losses and trying to repair at least some of the harm they have faced, should also be undertaken in parallel with the peace process.

Moreover, it is vital to ensure that “negative peace” –focusing on ending the violence—and “positive peace” – emphasizing on addressing the root causes through addressing the issues of injustice, recognition of the minority group’s language, culture and education, go hand in hand. While Bangkok has been encountering protracted political conflict in recent months, southern violence has also continued unabated and even intensified -- many victims are sadly non-



combatants. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to put the peace process on the national agenda. Such development would reflect the serious commitment of the Thai state for the peace process.

In order to improve the peace process for southern Thailand, the IPP would like to propose the following recommendations:

Future Track-1 Peace Talks

- Establish Peace Secretariats with a small number of professional staff, who are encouraged to interact and communicate with each other regularly to work towards a common understanding of the challenges ahead.
- Establish mixed issue-centered working groups to deepen the mutual understanding of all contested issues and to work on options for common ground in a step-by-step manner on critical issues such as new governance structure, education, language, culture.
- Expand the length of future meetings so that both parties would have more time for discussion. Moreover, they should also agree in advance on a more detailed agenda and work together towards a common roadmap sequencing the issues at stake.
- Agree on a common Code-of-Conduct concerning the communication and media work outside of the confidential peace dialogue sessions.
- Consider changing the nature of the talk from dialogue to peace negotiation with a mutually-endorsed mediator. Besides, the process should include observers and witnesses, which could be representatives of neighboring countries or international organizations recognized by both partners.
- Hold intra-party dialogues among various groups and agencies within their own sides so as to come up with a more unified stance ahead of the scheduled meetings.
- Create and nurture Track 1.5 dialogue processes for the purposes of exploring new



PEACE MEDIA DAY

PPP101: Pa(t)tani Peace Process

10 ปีความรุนแรง, 1 ปี สันติภาพชายแดนใต้/ปาตานี
27-28 FEB 2014 @Comm-Sci PSU Pattani

ground for compromises, help break deadlocks and provide a safety-net for the Track 1 process, which will time and again struggle with crises and obstructions.

Multi-Track Peace Process and Infrastructure for Peace Support

- Civil society, academics and media, both national and local, should collectively explore how to improve public awareness of the peace process. In order to promote peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society, it is vitally important to open political space for people from all walks of life, particularly the minority Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Chinese, to express their opinions and concerns vis-à-vis the peace process.
- Support the establishment of the Peace Resource Center in order to provide all parties and stakeholders with knowledge about the state-of-the-art of peace processes, to create a “safety-net” by inviting people from all stakeholders to contribute to inclusive solutions and to monitor the peace process.
- Establish community-based peace committees in order to raise awareness and knowledge of the overall peace process among local people as well as to create local dispute mechanism so as to prepare for future conflict transformation.
- Establish a “Council for People’s Dialogue” that will function as a common space for all groups and stakeholders to express their views and discuss any contentious issues in relations to the discussion in the Track 1.



PEACE MEDIA DAY

PPP101: Pa(t)tani Peace Process

10 ปีความรุนแรง, 1 ปี สันติภาพชายแดนใต้/ปาตานี
27-28 FEB 2014 @Comm-Sci PSU Pattani