

THAILAND



The Asia Foundation in Thailand promotes peaceful conflict resolution, encourages citizen engagement in the political process, and supports innovative programs that will build more responsive and transparent systems of governance throughout the country.

The Asia Foundation has worked in Thailand since 1954. As Thailand's political context has changed dramatically in recent years, the Foundation places a priority on strengthening effective institutions of democracy and resolving conflict in the three Muslim-dominated southern-most provinces.

MITIGATING CONFLICT IN THE SOUTH

Thailand faces violent unrest in the southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat where the population is predominately Muslim. While the causes of conflict are complex, The Asia Foundation recognizes that identity, education, economic opportunity, and participation in local decision-making are the basis from which peaceful development will emerge.

Situated between Buddhist Thailand and mostly Muslim Malaysia, these border states have a cultural and linguistic identity that is distinct from mainstream society in both countries. This unique identity has long been threatened by Thai ethno-centric government policies and alienation among the Muslim community has been a major driving factor for militancy. In keeping with the government's evolving policy to allow Thai-Malays in the south greater cultural



space, the Foundation supports locally-driven efforts to preserve this cultural identity and reduce the motivation for armed insurgency.

Foundation programs in the south are designed to create equal rights and opportunities for Muslim citizens. The Foundation has partnered with southern educational institutes to reform the secular curriculum of private Islamic secondary



schools (*pondok*) so that students will have a better chance of advancing economically and socially within Thai society. To enable Muslim citizens to interact with Thai officialdom using their own Pattani-Malay dialect language, the Foundation supported the publication of Thailand's first Pattani-Malay/Thai/Malay dictionary and the development of additional complimentary language tools for government officials and NGOs.

Distrust of the central Thai government is high in these three provinces and the Foundation works to combat impunity by improving the use of forensic science at crime scenes through the education of law enforcement officials and medical practitioners. Working with lawyers in the south, the Foundation has also established a legal aid program based on its successful mobile legal aid clinic for people affected by the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004.



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Since 1968, the Asia Foundation has donated nearly three million books through its Books for Thailand program.

Each year, new English-language books are donated to nearly 750 schools, universities, and libraries, especially those in rural areas.

As part of its program to mitigate conflict in the south, the Foundation supported the creation and publication of the very first Pattani-Malay/Thai/Malay dictionary.

Programs such as these lead to reconciliation by establishing social, legal, and political conditions that can address the immediate grievances of the Thai-Malay population. In addition, the Foundation works with a prestigious Thai think-tank to conceive and advocate a peace plan that could establish the framework for lasting peace in the south.

ENABLING CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The Asia Foundation and its partners designed a unique participatory training program called Civic Participation in Local Governance (CPLG) to provide the tools, skills, and encouragement needed for citizens to actively participate in local governance. Attended by government



officials, civic leaders, and representatives of grassroots NGOs, CPLG workshops cover topics such as community rights, ordinances, and development plans.

With assistance from Foundation staff and partners, the CPLG curriculum has been tailored to the varied circumstances of communities throughout Thailand. In the north, the Foundation supported a local NGO using CPLG trainings

to boost the political involvement of hill-tribe women. In the northeast, CPLG workshops have dealt with specific environmental problems such as water management and hazardous industrial waste disposal. In the southernmost provinces, CPLG meetings provide a much-needed forum for open discussion and the CPLG content has been adapted as a radio script so that community radio stations can broadcast it to an even wider audience.

SUPPORTING POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

In the wake of Thailand's military coup in September 2006, The Asia Foundation has worked toward reestablishing responsive institutions of democratic governance. The Foundation assists Thai reformers within government and civil society to further debate on constitutional reforms and rebuild accountability mechanisms. Working with King Prajadhipok's Institute (KPI) government officials and civil society leaders, the Foundation aims to ensure the participation of civil society in drafting key legislation that will promote democratic values and processes. The Foundation is currently conducting a nationwide opinion survey on constitutional reform that will be the first of its kind in Thailand.

Another Foundation program cultivates young leaders from marginalized groups across Thailand, including tribal minorities in the north, those at risk of human trafficking in the northeast, and the Thai-Malay population in the south. The Foundation conducts civic education among hundreds of marginalized youth to enhance their understanding of the political and social needs of their communities. This program aims to establish a new generation of democratic leaders that will have the knowledge and skills to assert their rights and participate in the political and social transformation of their communities.

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