

SPOTLIGHT ON R2P



The 2023 National Dialogue on Atrocity Prevention “Media, Journalism, and Atrocity Prevention”

The 2023 Thai National Dialogue on Atrocity Prevention was organized in a hybrid format at the Montien Surawong Hotel in Bangkok and online, on September 28, 2023. It brought together participants from various sectors, including civil society organizations, journalists, academics, and students from multiple institutions, to discuss the role of media and journalism in atrocity prevention. The dialogue was organized by the Center for Democratic Innovation, Human Security, and Atrocity Prevention (DISAP) and the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS-Thailand), Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, with support from the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, and the University of Queensland and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

The dialogue featured three sessions focusing on the roles of media and journalism in conflict situations and the implementation of atrocity prevention. The featured a keynote speech from Mr. Soe Myint, Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder of Mizzima and a panel discussion joined by Mr. Don Patan, Asia Foundation; Assistant Professor Dr.

Phansasiri Kularb, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, and a special lecture by Dr. Pawat Satayanurug, Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University.

Welcoming and Opening Remarks

Assistant Professor Dr. Pongphisoot Busbarat, the Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS-Thailand) delivered his welcome remarks at the opening of the dialogue. Dr. Busbarat pointed out conflict situations in many cases, including the civil war in Myanmar and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which both undermine international security. He highlighted the critical role of media in understanding social conflicts. He also referred to the discussion at the previous year's national dialogue where participants exchanged ideas on the crucial role of media in both international and domestic contexts, leading to their proposal for the organization this year's dialogue focusing on the role of media in conflict and atrocities prevention.

Associate Professor Dr. Prakorn Siriprakob, the Dean of the Fac-



Welcoming Remarks by Dr. Pongphisoot Busbarat, Director of ISIS-Thailand, Faculty of Political Science

ulty of Political Science, delivered an opening remark. He thanked Dr. Noel M. Morada, Director (Regional) of the Asia Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P), and Dr. Pimrapa Dusadeeisariyakul, Project Manager at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, including all co-organizers and attendees, for providing support for the event. Dr. Siriprakob highlighted that violence and mass atrocities are significant issues that are likely to occur more, which brings challenges to humanity and human security. Media and journalism are essential in making society understand the problem of violence and present guidelines for

detering and preventing it. The discussion at the national dialogue will hopefully help us understand the role of media and journalism in atrocity prevention.



Opening Remarks by Dr. Prakorn Siriprakoob, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University



Opening Remarks by Dr. Noel M. Morada on behalf of APR2P

Dr. Noel M. Morada delivered his opening remark on behalf of APR2P and thanked Dr. Bhanubatra and his team in organizing this year's dialogue. He also mentioned his continuing work on accountability for atrocities in Myanmar, including the role hate speech and incitement in social media.

For her part, Dr. Dusadeeisariyakul from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation highlighted the critical role of the media and journalism in a democratic society, including the information warfare that has existed since World War II. However, the current flow of information could cause conflicts that may lead to incitement to violence.



Dr. Pimrapa Dusadeeisariyakul on behalf of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

Session 1: Keynote Speech

The keynote remark was delivered by Mr. Soe Myint, Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder of Mizzima News Agency. The title of his talk was "Everyday Experiences of Media and Journalists in the Time of Crisis."

Mr. Myint highlighted the risks faced by journalists in periods of conflict in Myanmar, especially for the independent media, as they could also fall victim to violence. He cited a study that found that Myanmar is the most at risk for violence. Since the 2021 coup and the emergence of widespread resistance to the military government, more than 70% of the people used Facebook as a communication platform and how independent media has become a reliable news source for citizens.

The Rohingya crisis was an important milestone in Myanmar media's awareness of freedom of speech and the press. The government of the day threatened to clamp down on several news agencies that attempted to report on the plight of the Rohingya. Following the 2021 coup, threats against independent media increased further, including the arrest of journalists and their families. In this context, independent news agencies used a strategy known as "one foot in, one foot out," which led to the creation of a network of independent media agencies in Myanmar that can communicate with one another. However, social media is



Keynote Speech by Mr. Soe Myint



now being used by the military government to spread disinformation. Specifically, it sent people to Russia for psychological warfare training as part of a campaign to spread misinformation. The use of hate speech and disinformation in Myanmar increase the risk of more violence happening. Hence, it is important that social media platforms such as Facebook adopt certain measures to contain the spread of hate speech and fake news.

Accordingly, state disinformation operations are complex to combat. For independent media, one of the efforts to counter fake news is to report using ethnic languages and build relationships with media outlets of various ethnic groups so that people can choose how to receive the news. This could help people be aware of situations occurring in other areas and contain the spread of fake news and hate speech.

Mr. Myint pointed out that independent media must promote freedom of speech and freedom of the press especially in the context of Myanmar. International actors can help by pressuring Myanmar's military regime to respect these principles in peacetime and during crises.

Participants in the dialogue raised questions about the safety of journalists in Myanmar, and Mr. Myint pointed out that although journalism in Myanmar has become riskier, journalists continue to do their work by reporting the news. Citizens trust independent media like Mizzima not only for their political news but also for other news, such as education. Therefore, media organizations must continue receiving external assistance, including financial support. He also lamented that the protection of journalists in Myanmar has yet to receive the international attention it deserves. He noted that journalists and media groups in Myanmar have not established networks with their counterparts in other ASEAN countries, given the current situation where people are constantly being arrested or forced to leave the country. Engaging with other media organizations in ASEAN would be an essential priority goal that must be considered by journalists and news organizations in Myanmar.

Session 2: Roundtable Discussions



Roundtable discussion with Assistant Professor Dr. Pansasiri Kularb (middle) and Mr. Don Pathan (left) with Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang (right) as a moderator

The second session of the dialogue is a panel on “Reporting Violence and Atrocity in the Age of Disinformation and Disruption: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Prospects.” It featured Assistant Professor Dr. Pansasiri Kularb from the Faculty of Communication Arts Chulalongkorn University and Mr. Don Pathan from the Asia Foundation. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, served as the session moderator.

Mr. Don Pathan began the session by discussing his experience as a journalist in conflict zones such as the border regions of the three southern-most provinces of Thailand. He pointed out that the most essential thing in his work is journalism ethics and the relationship between journalists and their news sources. Specifically, he stressed that journalists must not judge the people they cover in the news (i.e., do not take the moral high ground). Journalists should be careful about biases when reporting the news by leaning too much towards one side, as this could destroy the journalist’s credibility. Accordingly, this could hurt a journalist’s career.

Mr. Pathan also addressed the issue of Thailand’s media becoming part of, rather than helping to solve, the country’s problems. Specifically, this is because the media often portrays violence in conflict areas as a crime rather than focusing on the root causes of the conflict. He also pointed to the problem of news agencies reporting on issues centered on the ideas or views of peo-

ple in Bangkok. For example, news coverage of the last election was predominant in the Thai media and missed covering news on conflict issues in the three southern border provinces. He also attributed the current problem in Thailand’s media reporting to journalists receiving inadequate compensation.

Assistant Professor Dr. Pansasiri Kularb discussed the perspective of the Bangkok people as the focus of Thai media. She suggested that current news reporting prioritizes phenomenological reports rather than in-depth investigations. It is a result of the media industry’s market system, which consequently affects the society’s understanding of conflicts and situations. Based on her research studying news coverage of political rallies in Thailand, Dr. Kularb argued that historically the media had played a part in legitimizing violence against people since the events of October 6, 1976.

Dr. Kularb suggested that the market system impacts even the media that claim to support democracy. They must obey the system to continue reporting, particularly when social media platform providers like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok have become essential platforms that can generate income for various news agencies based on the amount of participation or engagement rate. As a result, although it is the media’s responsibility to report news in all areas, those media need to make money and increase participation to generate more income at the end.

Moreover, social media platform providers can customize the content for users to see on their screens. This leads to problems such as ‘echo chamber’ and ‘bubble filter’ problems or problems from using AI to detect violent content. As a result, there may be portrayals of violent content that emerges from good intentions, such as showing images of violence to communicate violence prevention. Sometimes, AI sees content without considering the context, causing content or news that should be published to disappear or get deleted.

However, Dr. Kularb pointed out

that the market system also has a positive side to journalism’s news reporting. For example, it can fact-check popular content online using Google Maps, including news about protests. This could help law enforcement agents or the police to be more cautious about using violence against protesters. Journalists could interview groups of people who rarely get space in the media, which helps society better understand their views and actions.

Dr. Kularb suggested that the market system can benefit the media and promote open and comprehensive news reporting. However, business operations must be transparent. Regarding income sources and media ownership, she explained that social media platform providers must adhere to ethical principles (technological ethics). In the future, she expects that the media will not have to worry about being sued into silence by the state, also known as SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), or fact-checking, and that the private sector will also work based on facts and human rights principles.

During the Q&A session, participants expressed interest on the issue of access to news sources in conflict situations. Both speakers contend that this issue may be sensitive, and the safety of the news source and fact-checking in news reports must be considered. As such, media neutrality in news reporting and measures against fake news should use the “sandwich” technique in reporting the news, which involves presenting both sides of the story. This method could help audiences assess which parts of the information are false and correct. This is essential, particularly in preventing the spread of hate speech and fake news. Both speakers highlighted at the end that although today’s journalism focuses more on news reporting methods, it is also necessary for journalists to learn basic knowledge about politics and various conflicts to present the news in a comprehensive way and with more depth.

Session 3: Special Lecture

The afternoon's special lecture was given by Assistant Professor Dr. Iur. Pawat Satayanurug, Deputy Dean for Research Affairs of the Faculty of Law, on "Why should we be aware of violence against humanity and mass atrocities?". His lecture was divided into three sections, which focused on the role of the media in contributing to, protecting from, and preventing violence. He started with an examination of incidents in which the media played a crucial role in causing violence against groups of people, such as in the case of Rwanda, which used the radio to broadcast hate messages that led to atrocities. In the case of Thailand, on October 6, 1976, newspapers were used to spread hateful messages against students. At present, there is also the incident of the Rohingya. The Rohingya advocates have sued Facebook as a contributor to inciting violence, claiming that the social media platform should be held accountable for failing to prevent the spread of hate speech against the Rohingya population.

In terms of protection, Dr. Satayanurug surveyed the laws that can punish those who commit acts of violence, both domestically (e.g., based on various criminal laws) and internationally (e.g., ICCPR, CAT, CERD, Genocide Convention of 1948 and 1949 and additional protocols, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.) He also pointed to the limitations of these international laws, stating that cases can only be prosecuted against member states and individuals. These laws and conventions also contain provisions in which many offense elements may be challenging for prosecution.

As for preventing violence, Dr. Satayanurug pointed out that the media may be a tool for spreading hateful messages that lead to violence. For example, in Sri Lanka, anti-Muslim riots forced the government to declare a state of emergency, which also necessitated the denial of access to Facebook. Media companies should, therefore, be more responsible and adhere to human rights protection principles by preventing the spread of news



Special Lecture by Assistant Professor Dr. Iur. Pawat Satayanurug

that could incite violence against any community or vulnerable populations. Dr. Satayanurug concluded that there is a need for increasing awareness about the role of journalism in preventing atrocities. Specifically, the media must be able to distinguish between fake news and facts, understand relevant laws, sympathize with victims of violence, assess factors that may lead to violence, and use resources of the news media to prevent violence.

During the Q&A session, participants discussed the limitations of prosecuting genocide under international laws, such as the process of litigation and inadequate evidence to prosecute alleged perpetrators of the crime.

Session 4: Reflections and the Next Steps

The final session allowed participants to exchange opinions and propose the future role of the media and mass communication in preventing violence. Participants were divided into two groups: the first was composed of journalists and the second composed of students. Journalists mainly discussed conflict awareness and explored the importance of training in covering Thai politics to report news with a better understanding of conflicts, in-depth investigation and analysis, and data collection on past violence related to coups in Thailand and Myanmar. They also discussed the relevance of creating a network of journalists and news media to produce in-depth news in the country. The second group, composed of students, focused on the role of technology, such as Artificial Intelligence, in atrocity prevention and promoting media awareness to prevent violence.

Conclusion

The organization of the national dialogue for this year was designed based on the previous year's discussions and recommendations, especially on the crucial role of media and journalism in preventing incitement to violence and atrocity crimes. The event explored the role of media in inciting violence in the past and how media companies and practitioners can contribute more positively to the prevention of violence in the future. The event will be followed by the training of journalists and media in reporting atrocities and violence between November 21 and 23, 2023, in Chiang Mai.

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Group sharing and the Next Steps



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