

SPOTLIGHT ON R2P



The Third National Dialogue on Atrocities Prevention: Prevention of Atrocities through Teaching History and Keeping Memories

Introduction

The third Thailand National Dialogue on R2P was organized by the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) in partnership with the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University at Centre Point Silom Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand on 23 July 2019. There were 40 participants in the dialogue, including university lecturers, school teachers, academics, researchers, government officers, as well as civil society actors from Thailand. The dialogue also invited international resource persons Dr Tibi Galis and Dr Kerry Whigham from the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) to share their insights on memory and atrocities prevention with the local participants.

The one-day national dialogue covered the following topics: 1) the Role of Transitional Justice and Memory in Atrocity Prevention; 2) Teaching Histories and Memories in Thai Context; 3) Historical Textbooks, Memorialization and Implications on Conflict/ Atrocity Prevention in Thai Society; and 4) Roles of Academic Institutions and Media on Educating History and Memory for Atrocity Prevention. Furthermore, the participants also shared their recommendations for the next dialogue and possibilities to move forward the engagement on atrocities prevention and R2P in Thailand.

Welcome Remarks by Organizers

In his welcoming remarks, Dr. Eakpant Pindavanija, Director of Institute

of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University provided an example of a documentary called 'the Accountant of Auschwitz' which is about a bookkeeper in a Nazi camp who, after 70 years, was accused of complicity in the holocaust. He suggested that an important takeaway from the movie is the importance of remembering the consequences of atrocities for both primary and secondary wounds of the victims in order to prevent future atrocities from happening again. He also stressed the necessity of accountability of perpetrators as this contributes significantly to atrocity prevention in the end.

Meanwhile, Dr. Noel Morada, Regional Director of APR2P, expressed his appreciation to the contribution of the Institute for Human Rights and

Peace Studies of Mahidol University and the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation for this year's national dialogue on R2P in Thailand. He recognized that the topics included in the dialogue will contribute to realizing several recommendations made in last year's dialogue on the important roles of academia and education in the promotion of R2P and atrocity prevention. He expressed hope that participants in this year's dialogue will commit to further deepening the understanding of R2P in Thailand.



The Role of Transitional Justice and Memory in Atrocity Prevention

Dr. Tibi Galis and Dr. Kerry Whigham, Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR), highlighted the importance of transitional justice as policy complex that could prevent atrocities, given that it could penetrate into the core of the structures and habits of societies that are prone to mass atrocities to happen.

Dr. Galis explained four processes of transitional justice, namely: (1) the justice process, which aims to bring perpetrators of atrocities into trial and punishment; (2) the reparation process, which attempts to bring redress for the victims of atrocities; (3) the truth process, which aims to fully investigate and enable the society to know what happened during atrocities; and (4) the institution reform process, which aims to ensure that such atrocities do not happen again.

He also identified various transitional justice mechanisms that includes prosecution, lustration/vetting (getting rid of administrative procedure that lead to the atrocities), rehabilitation, restitution, reparation, amnesty, truth commissions, institutional reform, DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, memory politics (memory education, memorialization). These mechanisms emphasize the importance of memory politics and memorialization as critical components since victims—both as individuals and collectively as a civil society—could pursue memory initiatives that could then be used to advocate for other transitional justice mechanisms.

For his part, Dr. Whigham distinguished memory from history by defining memory as selective version of past events chosen by society or government that impact the present and influence its vision of the future. He pointed out that memory is dynamic and could be used to either prevent or instigate violence; therefore, the preventive capacity of memory depended largely on intention and practices of such memory initiatives. Dr. Whigham also suggested that atrocity prevention could happen as processes of different initiatives over a long period of time in order to mitigate risk factors before atrocities could occur. He also provided examples of variety of initiatives contributing to public memory and atrocity prevention ranging from civil society activism (e.g. Madres de Mayo movement), historical dialogue programs, education programs, the arts, as well as sites and spaces of memory. In particular, Dr. Whigham strongly argued that sites or spaces of memory should not be as invisible as traditional monuments but they should be filled with live activities that would engage the past to mitigate risk factors in order to prevent violence from recurring.



Teaching Histories and Memories in Thai Context

Assistant Professor Dr. Chaowalit Chaowsangrat, Department of History, Thammasat University, elaborated on four significant characteristics of Thailand's historical narratives, namely: obligative history, religion oriented-history, great man history, and perpetrator history. Comparing Thailand with Latin American countries which had gone through the same period of dictatorship; however, unlike Thai history, he pointed out that Latin American history is a collective of micro histories that contributed to the building of public memory. Dr. Chaowalit argued that as long as the teaching of history in Thai schools was still dominated by any of the above-mentioned four perspectives, it would be impossible that other alternative histories like people's history or history of victims could their voices be heard in society. He maintained that the four types of dominant histories did not lead to the understanding of violence nor social inequality, as each had been embedded with elites who have good merit in their past life is the main narrative; therefore, it was impossible to defy their narratives. Dr. Chaowalit also pointed out that with regard to the insurgency in the southern provinces of Thailand, we often hear only of the narratives of perpetrators of violence and the Thai state, but rarely about the stories or narratives of victims in the ongoing violence.

Transitional Justice is the policy complex that has ... as one of its objects the altering of the societal relations that led to the perpetration of abuses in the past. (Ramirez-Barat, 2014)

Transitional Justice is an essential component of any mass atrocity prevention strategy, given that it can penetrate into the core of the structures and habits that allow for mass atrocities to happen.



Assistant Professor Akarapong Khamkoon, from Pridi Bhanomyong International College, Thammasat University stressed that Thai history is actually a set of selected of memories that serve to maintain the staus quo and support state security. He explained that the conventional history of Thailand did not aim to study essential historical changes that resulted from various conflicts as naturally occurring in every society. Instead, the narratives in Thai history mainly focused on the harmonious society without recognising existing diversities. Akarapong highlighted that the content of Thai history had been mainly drawn from the central power, whereas the stories from the rest of the country were not articulated. Moreover, he pointed out that there was unfortunately no teaching about the history of neighboring countries in Thailand's history education



Historical Textbooks, Memorialization and Implications on Conflict/ Atrocity Prevention in Thai Society

Associate Professor Dr. Puangthong Pawakapan from Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, argued that challenging the predominant history narrative also means challenging those in authority in which the elite is primarily concerned with how history should be told. She argued that in many democratic societies, history was not written for the benefit of the state but in an attempt to examine mistakes/failures in the past so that it would not happen again in the

future. She maintained that in fact, Thai society seemed to be sensitive to emerging challenges to the status quo, which has been maintained by either love or fear.



Dr. Puangthong also pointed out that, in the era of new communication technologies where the state could no longer fully control the media, it is possible that people would now be able to present various versions of history by themselves. She introduced the “Documentation of 6 October” project, which is an online archive of materials and information related to the massacre on 6 October 1976 in the Thammasat University campus that has been largely ignored in the teaching of Thai history. In this online archive, she explained that we could make the voices of victims or victims’ families heard by the public even as she expressed hope that an online archive and learning center of human rights in Thailand could be set up in the future.

Dr. Vachararutai Boonthinand from Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, critically stressed that education was an agent of political socialization. She argued that apart from transferring knowledge, education had to also reflect political, social, and cultural aspects of society. She emphasized the need to understand and see through what kind of citizenship the Thai state would like to promote and nurture, and how education could be geared to serve that purpose. She also pointed out that there are elements in the “hidden curriculum” in school, such as lining up in the morning, student hair style, and other physical disciplines,

which reflect the state’s desire to have disciplined citizens. Therefore, she argued that Thai education was designed to promote social conformity to the same things, did not allow questioning of the hierarchy of authority, and social norms did not give priority to recognizing differences or diversity in society. While not suggesting a radical change in the present curriculum, she proposed the idea of training teachers so that they would be equipped with new pedagogy that could encourage an open and more democratic classroom. For example, instead of having only one conclusion in teaching history, the history class should be about exchanging different opinions.



Dr. Chalermchai Phantalert from Office of Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education, pointed out that the basic education in Thailand were currently facing several challenges such as lack of systemic channel to make use of research from higher education, and a centralized bureaucracy. However, he commented that the new recruitment of over 150,000 teachers could be seen as opportunity for a new and dynamic education system in Thailand. Moreover, he also mentioned about an ongoing effort from Ministry of Education in finding a common history among Southeast Asia countries with the support of UNESCO.



The Role of Academic Institutions and Media in Teaching History and Memory for Atrocity Prevention

During this session, the participants identified various challenges to the teaching of history and memory as part of promoting atrocities prevention in Thailand. This include the following:

- Teaching history as part of atrocities prevention should be conducted by using alternative approaches. However, under the current set up, teaching history is constrained by outcome-based education that assess students' learning based on passing the national examinations.
- Teaching history is also constrained existing political regime. However, we can adapt by using other topics of discussion such as Ann Frank diary or the fateful October 1976 events for students to be able to relate these historical events to the present situation obtaining in Thailand.
- Given the fact that education is political, there is a question about how we can work in the contested political space. It is important to think about empowering students and encourage them to have critical thinking. This will also contribute to preventing atrocities in the future.
- It is essential to also build capacity for innovative approaches in teaching history as well as to strengthen civil society networks.
- New media technologies can be potentially used to incite hate speech. It is therefore crucial to remind media companies and journalists that the media has a role to play in the atrocity prevention.



Recommendations for Next Dialogue on Atrocities Prevention in Thailand

In her concluding remarks, Assistant Professor Dr. Pranee Thiparat from Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, said that public awareness of R2P and atrocity prevention in Thailand still remains very low even as she pointed out that there was lack of the engagement with the media and civil society on issues related to atrocity crimes. She also pointed out that there are existing risk factors for atrocities in Thai society, such as hate speeches, discrimination, and intolerance at various levels, etc. It is therefore important to pay attention to these risk factors in order to prevent violence that could lead to atrocity crimes in the country.

Following discussions, the participants came up with the following the recommendations for further discussion/action in the next national dialogue:

- Identifying the risk factors that are relevant to Thailand and what the different stakeholders from various sectors such as education, media, religious organizations, etc., can do about it;
- Organizing dialogues on atrocities prevention at regional level, such as those in areas facing very high risk—for example, in southern provinces of Thailand;
- Generating a systematic monitoring and mapping of conflicts in Thailand and use the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes;
- Organizing a training the trainers seminar on R2P and atrocities prevention for teachers;
- Involving media sector in the dialogue to promote awareness about R2P and atrocities prevention.



vention;

- Encouraging school executives to support teaching of human rights protections principles; and
- Developing appropriate training and teaching manuals for school teachers



In the next dialogue, it is important to consider for discussion more concrete recommendations related to conducting relevant research on atrocities prevention, in particular risk assessments and conflict mapping in Thailand, as well as capacity building activities and developing manuals for teaching history in schools.

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