

# SPOTLIGHT ON R2P



## Thailand R2P Program 2021

### National Dialogue on Atrocities Prevention: “Next Steps for Atrocity Prevention in Thailand and Southeast Asia”

#### The National Dialogue Organization

The Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) in partnership with the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy Program in International Development Studies (MAIDS-GRID), Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, organized the Thailand National Dialogue on Atrocity Prevention at the Anantara Siam Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand, and online on February 25, 2022. This year’s event was organized after a few years gap caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in a hybrid format. It involved participants of 30 people on-site and nearly 50 more online, including university lecturers, researchers, government officials, media, and civil society actors. The dialogue was also available in two languages—Thai and English—to allow international participants to understand atrocity prevention dynamics in Thailand and be able to engage with local actors.

The 2022 National Dialogue was organized under the theme, “Next Steps for Atrocity Prevention in Thailand and Southeast Asia.” It aimed to achieve two primary objectives: one, to raise awareness among participants about previous and active programs for preventing atrocity in the context of Thailand; second, to consider and assess the role of Thailand—especially its government—in atrocity prevention, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, this year’s National Dialogue featured the development of Thailand’s initiatives in preventing atrocities, the way forward towards future prevention, and a reflection of the unfolding atrocities in one of Thailand’s neighbouring countries with the ongoing civil war—Myanmar. These themes constituted the three main panels of the event. The event also included two keynote remarks highlighting the relevance of R2P and the importance of international efforts in atrocity prevention.

#### Welcoming and Opening Remarks

The national dialogue began with the welcoming remarks of Dr. Bhanubhatra Kaan Jittiang, the Director of MAIDS-GRID, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, and the national coordinator for Thailand’s country program of APR2P. Dr. Jittiang



Welcoming Remarks by Dr. Bhanubhatra Kaan Jittiang



Opening Remarks by Associate Professor Dr. Ake Tangsupvattana



Opening Remarks by Dr. Noel M. Morada

highlighted the significance of the dialogue organized during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. He discussed how COVID-19 had provided a context for the frequency of conflicts in many parts of the world and their intensity, requiring immediate global attention. Dr. Jittiang also elaborated on how various actors—both state and non-state actors—have used the pandemic to further their causes, restricting the freedom and rights of people in many places and perpetuating violence. The situation eventually caused irreversible damage to human lives and properties and distorted social fabrics. The national coordinator cited the civil war in Myanmar—which has occurred since the 2021 coup, as one example, begging a critical question: what can the international community do more to strengthen the human security of people and prevent atrocity?

Associate Professor Dr. Ake Tangsupvattana, the Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, delivered an opening remark on behalf of the Thai organizer. His speech echoed Dr. Jittiang’s emphasis on the significance of atrocity prevention in the Thai context. However, it focused more specifically on the whole-of-state and the whole-of-society approach-

es in mobilizing resources to prevent future atrocity and how the national dialogue serves as the major platform for all stakeholders to meet, exchange, and learn about atrocity prevention dynamics and means.

Afterward, Dr. Noel M. Morada, the Director (Regional Diplomacy and Capacity Building) of the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), delivered an opening remark on behalf of APR2P. He emphasized the continuing relevance of R2P in the Asia-Pacific context, given “no country or society is immune to atrocities,” and a large number of vulnerable populations are facing threats of violence and are at risk of experiencing atrocities. Accordingly, the national dialogue on the topic remains relevant to explore new ideas and recommendations which can be helpful for different stakeholders. Dr. Morada ended his remarks, paying gratitude to Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn, Dr. Pranee Thiparat, Dr. Sriprapha Petcharamesree, and other Thai scholars for their commitment to building capacity and promoting R2P and atrocity prevention in Thailand.

### Keynote Remarks

#### Atrocity Prevention and the Relevance of R2P

The constructive part of the 2022 National Dialogue started with the keynote remarks of Professor Dr. Alex J. Bellamy, the APR2P Director, entitled “Atrocity Prevention and the Relevance of R2P.” Professor Bellamy’s speech addressed five key questions, namely:

- What does it mean to talk about the atrocity in the present-day context?
- Why is atrocity prevention significant?
- What are the approaches to it?

- What role does R2P play in atrocity prevention?
- What does R2P matter, and will it continue to matter?

He started his talk by focusing on an atrocity crimes survey and identifying key trends. One of the critical points he presented was that there are sharp regional differences in atrocity prevention dynamics around the globe. Yet, the global trends are shaped by conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and there is an increase in violence in the region. Professor Bellamy subsequently classified the present-day conflicts generating most atrocities into five clusters: conflicts in MENA; the prolonged crises of unconsolidated statehood; situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan; Russia’s related disputes; and the war on terror. These conflicts, he argued, were pushed by various drivers, including the unresolved questions of statehood, economic crises, the rise of violent extremism, and geographical competition. They have eventually led to mass atrocities. Professor Bellamy then attempted to explore why the prevention of atrocity failed. He elucidated seven gaps:

- The difficulty of atrocity prevention
- The complication of international politics
- Major powers’ geopolitical interests
- Uncertain consequences of socio-political changes
- Imperfect information
- Domestic politics
- The occurrence of multiple crises

Despite challenges, Professor Bellamy drew from the UN’s lesson learned to



Keynote Speech by Professor Dr. Alex J. Bellamy

argue that atrocity prevention is possible—though difficult. However, successful actions in one case may fail in another, given different surrounding conditions. Thus, atrocity prevention may need to be done differently. There are several modes of atrocity prevention, ranging from violence escalation prevention to reducing the extent of violence. Professor Bellamy stressed the importance of unity of purpose—involving multiple actors—for atrocity prevention and suggested multiple streams of actions, including developing a national action plan, conflict resolution and preventive diplomacy, international assistance, comprehensive prevention approaches, and direct intervention.

Finally, Professor Bellamy highlighted the Responsibility of Protect (R2P) as a social norm guiding these practices and shaping societal actors' behaviors regarding atrocity prevention. The norm helps change expectations and conversations. However, several challenges must be addressed, such as the approach to strengthening atrocity prevention and the empowerment of actors to lead. Professor Bellamy eventually left a final question asking what Thailand more can do to prevent atrocity. This question constituted the core discussion for the national dialogue of this year.

#### *International Community and Atrocity Prevention*

To further explore atrocity prevention means—especially from the international community's perspective, Professor Emeritus Vitit Muntarbhorn of the Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Cambodia, illuminated the event with his dazzling keynote remarks. His speech consisted of three major components:

- The international set-up of atrocity prevention
- The localization of atrocity prevention in the Thai context
- Toolboxes for atrocity prevention in Thailand

Focusing on the international component, Professor Muntarbhorn discussed the added value of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) for atrocity



Keynote Speech by Professor Emeritus Vitit Muntarbhorn

prevention, suggesting it as a new way of thinking about humanitarian intervention. R2P reframed the issue in favor of the state's role in protecting their own people from four atrocity crimes and set a stage for the intervention. Besides, R2P has also become a validating norm and motivating axiom for changes—connecting the states and their role in atrocity prevention. Lastly, Professor Muntarbhorn contended that atrocity prevention as a framework drew a connection between state responsibility and individual criminal responsibility. This point helped making a transition to his second component of the speech: to what extent Thailand has embraced atrocity prevention.

Locating atrocity prevention in the Thai context, Professor Muntarbhorn questioned the Thai people's comprehension of the concept. For example, while the genocide component in the international convention is more than killing, the general translation of the term in Thai is misleading and limited to only one part: "killing." Second, Professor Muntarbhorn examined how atrocity prevention has become integrated into Thai society, especially Thai laws, before suggesting that it remains constrained. Finally, in terms of application, he probed whether Thailand has applied this concept to the larger societal understanding, in which he argued that Thailand has its own lessons learned, yet they have never been taught in schools.

Based on the assessments in the previous three areas, Professor Muntarbhorn contended that more work needed to be done, especially since atrocity prevention is about understanding. He offered ten toolboxes as Thai society is moving forward.

- Beneficial laws which lift the standard of social practices
- Good policy incorporating atrocity prevention
- Project or program that can provide people with a shared understanding
- Enforcing a case study to illustrate the significance of the issue at hand
- Resources (finance, knowledge, and leadership)
- Institution and personnel
- Data monitor to identify risk factors
- Education and capacity building project
- Accountability, especially for victims
- Space for broader social changes

Professor Muntarbhorn ended his remarks passionately, calling for the actions of everyone in preventing atrocity. He said, "we don't need anyone or need to wait for the state and the international community, and we can do it now." He argued that a stronger emphasis on atrocity prevention would make our society a better place for everyone to live.

#### **Panel Discussions**

##### *Capacity Building and Awareness Raising about Atrocity Prevention and R2P in Thailand*

The 2022 national dialogue featured three discussion panels, apart from illuminating keynote remarks. The first one focused on the existing capacity-building program for preventing atrocity from the discussion of an academic, a government official, and a representative of Thailand in the international human rights body. It highlighted initiatives and development on the issue of human rights, human security, R2P, and atrocity prevention to provide lessons learned and gaps for future improvement. Dr. Pranee Thiparat of the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, moderated the panel.

Her Excellency Professor Emeritus Dr. Amara Pongsapich, the former Chairwoman of the National Human Rights Commission and the current Thailand's



The Panel Discussion on Capacity Building and Awareness Raising about Atrocity Prevention and R2P in Thailand (From Right - H.E. Professor Emeritus Dr. Amara Pongsapich; Dr. Pranee Thiparat; Ms. Jitvipa Benjasil; and (on screen) Dr. Sriprapha Petcharamesree)

Representative to AICHR, started the panel by questioning the extent of capacity building on atrocity prevention. She suggested that Thailand's initiative remain primarily limited, and what have been done are simply a response to ad hoc situation without providing a lasting foundation. Accordingly, she concluded that capacity building for atrocity prevention in Thailand has only been an academic matter. Drawing from her experiences working at the regional level, Professor Pongsapich further illustrated how Southeast Asian states had not learned much from lessons in the region, especially during the Cambodian Genocide. Thus, more efforts need to be made to mainstreaming atrocity prevention and R2P—significantly beyond academia.

Ms. Jitvipa Benjasil, the Director of Social Division, Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reinforced some of the key points presented by Professor Pongsapich, especially the limited understanding of atrocity prevention in other societal sectors. From the government's perspective, she suggested that although works related to atrocity prevention may not be done through the specific lens of atrocity prevention, they are pursued from other related viewpoints, such as human security, human rights, and humanitarianism. For Thailand, Ms. Benjasil contended that many positive deliveries have emerged through the engagement between various agencies and international bodies—though they may not be known to the public. Some of the key highlights of the government's initiatives included the advocacy for ending impunity and the right to life, and the initiation of a policy preventing enforced disappearance. However,

these programs faced challenges, such as how to strike a balance between different practices in the light of changing security discourses and the lack of motivating political will.

The panel ended with the discussion of Dr. Sriprapha Petcharamesree, a Former Thailand Representative to AICHR, and the Advisor of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, who has been promoting atrocity prevention for more than two decades. She started her discussion by alluding to previous experiences during undergraduate years when there were no courses on atrocity prevention or human rights, which made knowledge of the topics subsumed in other courses and framings. Students, therefore, had to acquire understanding from field practices. Thus, mainstreaming this knowledge through education has become her significant area of engagement. However, Dr. Petcharamesree argued the Thai government had not yet taken concrete steps to educate human rights or atrocity prevention—despite participating in multiple human rights mechanisms. The lack of academic freedom also makes the human rights

or atrocity prevention education more difficult.

### *New Approaches and Efforts to Prevent Atrocities*

The second panel discussion provided a space for emerging scholars to share their views and recent initiatives on atrocity prevention. It considered the connection between atrocity prevention and human rights, human security, and other new frameworks and tools, including social media. The conversation was multidimensional, covering atrocity prevention in various countries' historical, migration, and social movements contexts. Dr. Pranee Thiparat also moderated this panel discussion.

Assistant Professor Dr. Kasira Cheepensook of the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, started the panel discussion by emphasizing risk factors reduction and monitoring. In the context of Thailand, Dr. Cheepensook explained that the Thai government has committed to atrocity prevention efforts and human security mainly in principle. However, many of them have not yet been translated into practice. She acknowledged that context matters significantly for atrocity prevention. Any initiatives in this regard will also require the whole-of-state and the whole-of-society approaches so that all stakeholders can engage and be inclusive. One of the crucial keys to successful atrocity prevention, according to Dr. Cheepensook, is human security. She emphasized that human is the most essential element of security policy. It should never be used as a means for any political end, especially in pursuing national security goals. Besides, Dr. Cheepensook also men-



The Panel Discussion on New Approaches and Efforts to Prevent Atrocities (From Right -Mr. Ratawit Ouaprachanon; Dr. Surachanee Sriyai; Dr. Pranee Thiparat; Dr. Kasira Cheepensook; Ms. Sirada Khemanitthathai)

tioned that mutual respect, gender sensitivity, and grassroots participation would strengthen foundation for atrocity prevention in the long run. In the end, she discussed the framework of analysis, which is developed to identify atrocity risks. She encouraged that it be used for the greater good of humanity so that future atrocities can be forewarned and prevented.

The panel's second speaker was Dr. Surachanee Sriyai of the Department of Government, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University. Her discussion focused mainly on the emerging tools for atrocity prevention, especially social media. In one of her studies, Dr. Sriyai contended that social media provided a space for naming and shaming, which can help reduce human rights violations. She also highlighted the importance of speed of action that social media tools bring to atrocity prevention. However, Dr. Sriyai urged participants to be cautious about the usage of social media and emerging tools in atrocity prevention. Somehow, these tools can also be the means to perpetuate violence and violate rights. The spread of fake news and misinformation campaign on social media platforms can also become a risk factor for atrocities. In a nutshell, Dr. Sriyai suggested that digital tools are a "neutral medium." Whether it will strengthen atrocity prevention or lead to more atrocities depends mainly on users.

Departing from the discussion of existing tools, Mr. Ratawit Ouaprachanon, a researcher from the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, called participants' attention to his investigation of mass atrocities presented in the Thai curriculum. He emphasized that education matters greatly for atrocity prevention, given that it shapes how people understand different atrocities and what they can do to prevent them. His findings indicated that teaching atrocities in the Thai context remained limited. Since textbooks touch the materials on the topic very lightly, students do not have a deep understanding of atrocities. Consequently, they may act in a way that glorifies war criminals, violent perpetrators, or their relevant institutions, such as Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Ms. Sirada Khemanitthathai, a lecturer from the Faculty of Political Science

and Public Administration, Chiang Mai University, was the last speaker on the panel. Looking at the atrocity prevention from the situation in Myanmar, she questioned the extent to which international laws are relevant when atrocities have happened and the extent to which intervention is justified given dire humanitarian needs. Ms. Khemanitthathai recognized that all parties might show restraints in pursuing any actions to respond to atrocity—including in the case of Thailand's reactions towards the 2021 Myanmar coup. However, she argued that the response to atrocities can still be pursued regardless. Ms. Khemanitthathai suggested that the state does not need to act purely out of humanitarian urge. For example, in the case of Myanmar, she indicated that humanitarian reactions of the Thai state could be driven based on their national interests in the way that the integration of refugees and migrants is to incorporate their human capital into the needs of the host society. Ms. Khemanitthathai's discussion provided a transition to the day's final panel focusing on atrocity prevention in action in the active case of Myanmar in crisis.

#### *Thailand, ASEAN, and Atrocity Prevention: Responses to the Myanmar Crisis*

The final panel discussion of the 2022 National Dialogue featured the ongoing situation in Myanmar and the role of Thailand and ASEAN in atrocity prevention. Leading figures joining the panel included (1) Ambassador Surapong Jayanama, the author of Thailand's Foreign Policy Towards Myanmar, (2) Associate Professor Dr. Naruemon Thabchumpon of the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, a prominent Thai expert on

Myanmar politics, and (3) Ms. Preeda Kongduang, a National Human Rights Commissioner, who have been active in advancing refugee rights. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang moderated the panel. This panel aimed to explore the area of possibility for Thailand's engagement with Myanmar.

Associate Professor Dr. Naruemon Thabchumpon started the conversation for this panel by providing a landscape for the Myanmar crisis. She offered different information regarding election trends, armed clashes, and the number of forcibly displaced and explored how what is happening in Myanmar multidimensionally affected Thailand's national interests. Dr. Thabchumpon particularly highlighted the role of business in prolonging the conflict. While some governments, such as Singapore, have sanctioned the military junta, firms from those countries have continued to invest in Myanmar—with financial benefits directly supporting the military regime. This scenario led Dr. Thabchumpon to question sincerity of these countries in resolving the Myanmar Crisis. The government professor left a powerful note calling for the more active role of ASEAN, the establishment of a humanitarian corridor, and the implementation of a no-fly zone to protect civilians from being attacked.

Ms. Preeda Kongduang was the second speaker on the panel. Her talk focused on the role of the National Human Rights Commission in managing the consequences of the Myanmar crisis. Ms. Kongduang recognized that the situation remained very challenging, and therefore, assistance could hardly be provided. However, humanitarian initiatives have emerged through engagements with various stakeholders rang-



Panel Discussion on Thailand, ASEAN, and Atrocity Prevention: Responses to the Myanmar Crisis (From Right – Dr. Bhanubhatra Kaan Jittiang; Associate Professor Dr. Naruemon Thabchumpon; Ambassador Surapong Jayanama; and (on screen) Ms. Preeda Kongduang)

ing from security actors to civil society organizations. Looking toward solutions from the perspective of the National Human Right Commission, Ms. Kongduang suggested that Thailand must rethink its security framing of the issue, especially on how the current lens is limited and inapt to respond to the ongoing dynamics. In addition, she called for more collaboration between all relevant stakeholders in providing support for innocent Myanmar civilians.

Ambassador Surapong Jayanama ended the panel discussion by providing insights into Thailand's foreign relations with Myanmar. Ambassador traced the history of the relationship between the two countries to illustrate how Myanmar has always taken advantage of Thailand's strategic importance because the Thai government lacks a firm foreign policy foundation and the courage to take action against the Myanmar governments. Consequently, Ambassador Surapong called for more active foreign policy from the Thai government concerning the ongoing crisis in Myanmar. He suggested Thailand deliberate its national interests and act accordingly clearly. Ambassador Surapong also commented on the role of ASEAN in the Myanmar crisis, suggesting that ASEAN should develop a mechanism to punish its own member states whenever they act in a rogue way. Such a mechanism will allow ASEAN to be more relevant and can hold member states accountable for misconduct.

### **Recommendations and Future Directions**

The organization's time-constraint and hybrid mode affected the 2022 National Dialogue, and limited direct and meaningful engagement between onsite and online participants. However, the event reignited interest in atrocity prevention—especially among younger academics from across the country—who plan to develop a new course on atrocity prevention and R2P in their curricula or to include materials on the topics in the current course. Many have expressed that atrocity prevention as a framework is timely and has the potential for providing rich insights into the development of global issues, given the ongoing conflicts in many places. Government officials and staff of CSOs also shared a very similar attitude. They hope to incorporate

atrocities prevention framework into their routine tasks. Despite those keen interests, more work needs to be done to promote and mainstream atrocity prevention and R2P through education and other forms of engagement. Three core pillars for future actions include: prevention is about understanding, capacity building, and policy engagement.

### **“Prevention Is About Understanding”**

Inspired by Professor Emeritus Vitit Muntarbhorn's speech, more understanding about atrocity prevention and R2P continue to be needed. As Professor Emeritus Dr. Amara Pongsapich said, “[the knowledge] must be spread beyond academic discussion,” meaning to disseminate knowledge to high school students and the public. Thus, there are two major areas of activities that can be pursued.

#### *Education and Awareness Raising*

Thailand continues to face a challenge in raising awareness on atrocity prevention and R2P due to the totalitarian culture in communities and schools. However, the rise of student movements in the past future has provided new hopes for a brighter future. In recent years, a few academics—especially under the leadership of Dr. Sripapha Petcharamsree and Mr. Ratawit Ouaprachanon—have also attempted to mainstream human rights education in the high school curriculum with the focus on “educating the educators,” namely schoolteachers and lectures. More support from broader academic engagement could help enhance the capacity of the ongoing initiatives. A closer partnership with the Office of the Basic Education Commission for the inclusion of atrocity prevention and human rights education in the school curriculum is also significant. This activity will hopefully expose students to more knowledge and better understanding about atrocity prevention from a young age.

#### *Research*

More research on atrocities and means to prevent them are also needed in Thailand. As Professor Emeritus Vitit Muntarbhorn suggested, several atrocities in Thailand remain unknown to the public, such as the mass atrocities of Romusha during the second world war. These events require inquiries from scholars. Results from these investiga-

tions will provide a better understanding of atrocities in Thailand and more knowledge from which future in-depth investigations could be conducted.

### **Capacity Building**

#### *Space for Discussion*

A discussion space is one of the key elements to further strengthening atrocity prevention capacity in Thailand. The annual organization of the national dialogue is one of the essential practices. However, similar events could be organized at the regional or provincial levels. These initiatives will provide more discussion space about atrocity prevention at the grassroots level and broaden targeted audiences beyond academics in higher education institutions. Besides, as Assistant Professor Dr. Kasira Cheppensook and Dr. Surachanee Sriyai mentioned, a discussion space can also be created in a classroom through course delivery and online platforms. Students can openly discuss atrocities dynamics and means to prevent them. Through these new spaces, new creativities for atrocity prevention may eventually emerge.

#### *Network Building and Stakeholder Engagement*

Network building will be a significant element for strengthening atrocity prevention capacity. The 2022 National Dialogue allowed a new group of academics, government officials, and civil society groups to engage with each other—though informally and limited due to hybrid organization. However, their presence throughout the one-day event demonstrated their commitment to learning and providing more support for atrocity prevention. In recent years, the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, as a co-host of the event, has also prioritized network building and engagement by becoming a member of the Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention (APPAP) and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P). This form of partnership will provide an example for other academic institutions and civil society organizations who will be joining a similar kind of formal community in the future.

### **Policy Engagement**

Finally, this year national dialogue reveals that atrocity prevention needs to be mainstreamed at the policy level

so that this concept and R2P become more relevant to the Thai context. The discussion of what Thailand should do to prevent more atrocities caused by the ongoing civil war in Myanmar suggested that engagement with policymakers can provide room for the actual practice of atrocity prevention which can take the form of humanitarian assistance and the application of human security measures. However, the prevention will only be concretized with political will and the support of policymakers.

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