

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Thongchai Iamnirand, 36, whose wife and father-in-law were killed on November 5 by suspected insurgents, tried hard to hold back his tears.

"All I have left is my son," Thongchai said.

"I am very bitter. This is Thai territory and something like this is still taking place. Was I wrong to be born in this place?" said Thongchai, who is hoping to be relocated outside the region with the help of the government.

Sommung Krainara, 50, recalled the November 5 incident, and how he trembled with fear as he gripped his shotgun given to him by the district chief. He said it was all very peaceful back in 1981 when he moved to the district.

"It never crossed my mind that something like this would occur," Sommung said.

*The Nation* (November 11, 2006)

The above quotations from a media report are obvious in themselves, as they convey the sentiments of grief and pain that people in the southernmost provinces of Thailand have had to encounter. Since the militancy started, it has been more than two years that Thai citizens in the Muslim-dominated provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkla have endured tough living conditions. More than 1,700 lives of civilians, soldiers and police have been lost from the almost daily-killing insurgency.<sup>1</sup> Fear, distrust and paranoia reigns amidst the once peaceful provinces of Thailand.

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<sup>1</sup> Agence France Presse, December 23, 2006.

The southern unrest was a huge predicament for the Thai government, headed by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. During his tenure, the problem broke out and became aggravated. On April 28, 2004, well-equipped Thai armed forces stormed into historical Krue Se Mosque, killing thirty-two insurgents armed with pistols, knives and machetes.<sup>2</sup>

Worse got worse months later. On October 25, 2004, a group of unarmed demonstrators died en mass while in official custody as they were transported from the demonstration site—in front of Tak Bai police station in Narathiwat province—to a military camp for interrogation. The cause for the mysterious deaths delivered by officials was that the 78 men died from suffocation and fatigue due to the fasting in the Muslim holy period of Ramadan.<sup>3</sup>

The two incidents were the catalyst for the ongoing southern violence. Not only did the incidents gravely deteriorate the human rights situation of Thailand, but they also re-entrenched anti-Muslim sentiment that erupted after the 9/11 tragedy. Muslim countries eyed Thailand as a Buddhist-dominated country engaged in conflicts with Muslim people, the minority group of the country. Thailand had to relieve pressure from the international community—especially Muslim countries—by allowing the delegate of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) to investigate the human right situation in the country.<sup>4</sup>

The situation became impaired when the extent of the problem spilled over into southern neighbor of Malaysia. On August 31, 2005, 131 Thai citizens fled the strife-torn region to seek shelter in Kelantan state of Malaysia. The Thai asylum-seekers said that the continual violence on Thai soil prompted them to cross international borderline to take refuge in Malaysia. The issue led to the loss of face for the Thai state and a subsequent diplomatic standoff between Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur because the fleeing of citizens from one country to another is a symptom of

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<sup>2</sup> The Nation, April 29, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> The Nation, October 27, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> The Nation, June 6, 2005.

failed state<sup>5</sup> and therefore the problem spilled over into the neighboring country.<sup>6</sup> Regrettably, the majority of Thai asylum-seekers decided to remain in Malaysia where they feel more secure physically because at least there was no insurgency in Malaysia. Apart from that, some Thai people in the south share the same ethnicity and linguistics with people in Kelantan State of Malaysia. The status quo of this group of refugees is lingering since the previous and present governments have failed to persuade them to return to their motherland.

After the bloodless coup on September 19, 2006, the problem of southern violence became the responsibility of the military-appointed interim government headed by privy councilor-turned-prime minister General Surayud Chulanont. So far, he has been so far unable to restore peace and security in the Malay-speaking region as well. On the contrary, more insurgency spiraled which led to a historical apology by the Buddhist prime minister to his Muslim fellow countrymen in the south.<sup>7</sup>

Primarily, the focal point of the solution for the far south is confined to state authority. Everyday, news reports in print and broadcast media only follow the development of government policy which aims at putting the end to the insurgency. For example, in the first year of the problem, the establishment of Southern Border Provinces Peacekeeping Command (SBPPC) was thoroughly investigated and criticized while the increasing number of military personnel was questioned as it could lead to the paranoia of southerners. Other military techniques, such as the use of drone to detect the militant fighters in the jungle-clad area or the use of aerial picture are carried.

Unfortunately, what has been missing is the role of civil society, especially those at the global level. It seems that the global civil society is insufficiently instrumental in helping solving the violence in the south.

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<sup>5</sup> This idea is gathered from a public lecture by Dr. Chaiwat Satha-anand's public lecture in October 2005 at Chulalongkorn University.

<sup>6</sup> Reuters, September 2, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Reuters, November 4, 2006.

The paper therefore seeks to find out why global civil society fails to effectively address the problem in the strife-torn region. In the first section, the definition of global civil society will be discussed to set the clear framework. The paper then moves to discuss the inability of global civil society to produce any tangible change in the realm of southern problem. Then, the feeling of otherness, which is reinforced by ethnocentrism, will be explained as among the prime reasons barring global civil society from solving the southern problem. Last but not least, the paper moves to elaborate on the incapability of media organizations which fail exercise their power to help the southerners.