

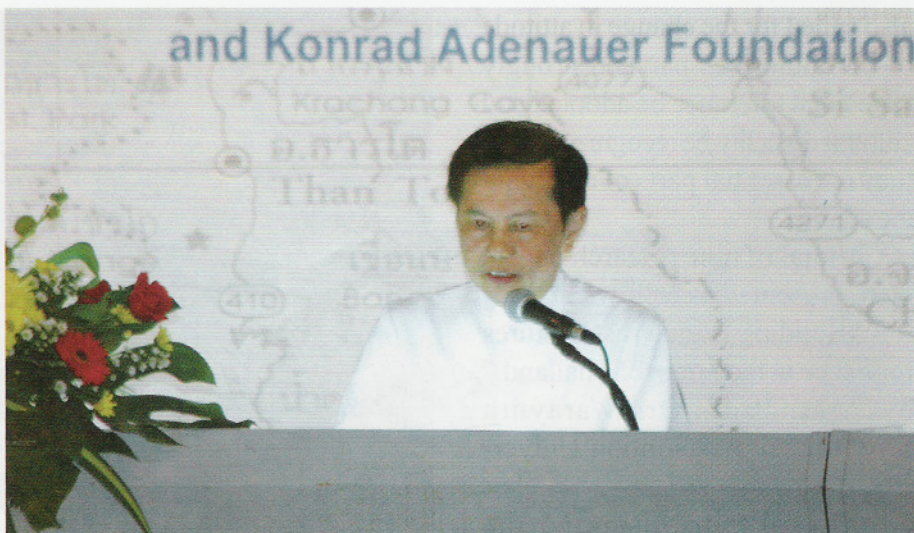
"INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT AND APPROACHING PEACE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND"

1-2 September 2006

The Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Bangkok, organized the above seminar at the Hall of Fame, Hua Mak campus, on September 1 and 2, 2006. Each day about 200 participants comprising heads of governmental institutions, former members of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), diplomats, media representatives, Thai and foreign academics, students and members of the general public, attended the seminar.

The main objective of the seminar was to offer a forum for Thai and international academics and public figures to explain the historical background, which is little known, and reasons behind the unrest in the southern Thailand, focusing tensions and pressures that have contributed to the prolonging of the conflict. The conference also provided suggestions on rebuilding the peace in the affected areas.

Speakers at the seminar comprised of prominent political scientists, political philosophers, security analysts, religion specialists and peace activists, who are engaging both academically and practically in addressing and seeking solutions for the crisis in southern Thailand. Three of the paper presenters were former members of the NRC, set up by the Thai government as an independent body to find solutions to the problem. Moreover, distinguished German experts were also invited to share their opinions and experience at the



President Dr. Bancha Saenghiran giving a speech during the International Seminar on Peace in Southern Thailand held at Hua Mak campus on September 1.



Dr. Surin Pitsuwan delivers his keynote address on achieving peace in Southern Thailand during the seminar held at Hall of Fame on September 1, 2006.

conference.

The opening ceremony of the seminar was addressed by Dr. Lars Peter Schmidt, Thailand representative, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung about the mission of the Foundation and the importance it gives to the task of resolving conflicts and building civil society. The president of Assumption University Rev. Bro. Dr. Bancha Saenghiran, also addressed the seminar. Calling the conflict a "soul searching situation for the Thai nation," the president talked about inner peace and the urgency of restoring trust and understanding so that peace will soon return to the strife-torn

southern Thailand. Dr. Michael Banzhaf, Chargé d'Affaires, German Embassy, Thailand spoke about the opportune timing of the initiatives being taken and lauded the efforts of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in organizing this seminar as being an important step towards building peace in southern Thailand. The keynote address was given by Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, a former member of parliament and former member of the National Reconciliation Commission of Thailand. The topic of his address was "The Cosmology of the Southern Conflict" in which he talked about the source of the conflict. He

also called for the change in attitude on the authorities' part and strongly urged that tolerance be adopted and cultural diversity be recognized since they are essential parts of resolving the conflict.

A total of nine research papers were presented as follows.

"Building High-Trust Cultures for Peace in the South of Thailand." by Asst. Prof. Dr. Warayuth Sriwarakuel, Assumption University,

"Local Patriotism and the Need for Sound Language and Education Policies in the Southern Border Provinces." by Dr. Gothom Arya, Mahidol University.

"Educational Change for Building Peace in Southern Border Provinces Of Thailand." by Dr. Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, Prince of Songkla University. "Nation-State and the Muslim Identity in the Southern Unrest and Violence." by Assoc. Prof. Thanet Apornsuvan, Thammasat University.

"The Ethno-Religious Dimension of the Conflict in Southern Thailand." by Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf, Assumption University,

"The Malaysian Factor in the Prospects for Peace in Southern Thailand." by Prof. Omar Farouk, Hiroshima City University,

"Understanding Reconciliation Problematique in Thai Society." by Prof. Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Thammasat University,

"The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Arab World - the Asian Dimension." by Dr. Michael Luders, German Oriental Foundation.

"Dialogue Between Christianity and Islam in Europe: Opportunities and Difficulties." by Mr. Gerhard Duncker, Oberkirchenrat, Office of Regional Protestant Churches of Westphalia.

All the papers focused on different dimensions of the conflict in southern Thailand approaching it



Dr. Lars Peter Schmidt of the Konrad Adenaur Stiftung addressing the International Seminar on Peace in Southern Thailand at Hall of Fame on September 1, 2006.



President Dr. Bancha Saenghiran in a photo session with some keynote speakers and distinguished guests during the International Seminar at Hall of Fame.

from different scientifically researched angles and proposed recommendations for the peaceful solution of the conflict. Paper presentations by the former members of the NRC brought first hand knowledge and experience concerning conflict and reconciliation to the seminar which was enthusiastically welcomed and greatly appreciated by the participants. This first-hand experience of the former NRC members was a real eye-opener for many of the seminar participants. The two German scholars viz., Dr. Michael Luders and Mr. Gerhard Duncker with their presentations from the German experience correlating the Thai and German contexts has added

to the breadth of the seminar discussion.

A book titled, "Understanding Conflict and Approaching Peace in Southern Thailand" edited by Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf and Dr. Lars Peter Schmidt, consisting of papers presented at the seminar was published on the occasion of the seminar and distributed to all participants. The book received a very warm welcome and great appreciation and has promoted much interest from the general public as reflected in the many daily requests for the book.

The general consensus is that the

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seminar was a big success and it provided a rare opportunity to the public to understand and appreciate the true situation in the southern Thailand.

The seminar is an important contribution to the objective of building peace in Thai society. It is hoped that the discussions held and the publicity it has generated will contribute to rebuilding mutual trust among the peoples of southern Thailand, so that peace and harmony return to the region.

Contributed by:
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