

Justice and Peace

Newsletter of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (Thailand)

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The JP E-Newsletter is published twice a year by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Thailand (CCJP.) It features the work of the CCJP and of the human rights situation in Thailand. Bylined articles do not necessarily reflect the official position of the CCJP.

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▲ participants.



▲ (left)
Fr. Vorayouth
Kitbamroong,
moderator, and
(right)
Prof.Pramuan
Pengchan, a
resource person.

A seminar on ‘Overriding Violence with Religious Teachings’ organized on August 27, 2008 at a conference room on the 10th floor of the Bishops’ Conference Building.

The current situation in Thai society occurred as a result of political crisis. There was division of the people into yellow and red factions. The conflict and hatred was seriously heightened and led to physical violence leaving behind some dead and injured people. This conflict emerged because of different political opinions, until it led to division in Thai society, which is ever more serious day after day.

Amidst this situation, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) has organized a seminar on ‘Overriding Violence with Religious Teachings’ to motivate all people to stop and reflect what was happening in peaceful and calm way, respecting difference of opinions based on religious teachings as holding principles. This was an attempt to contribute to the end of conflict and build peace in Thai society. The resource person was Mr.Pramuan Pengchan, former lecturer of Philosophy and Religion Department, Faculty of Humanities, Chiangmai University. He spent 66 days for a travel of over 1,000 kilometers on foot from Chiangmai Province in the North to Samui Island of Suratthani Province in the South, which is his birth place. This trip is the origin of the book “A Walk to Freedom”. It tells a story during the long trip to discover what have been disappeared in the present social current. Pramuan employed a method that no one has ever done, namely no request for food and accommodation from anyone, if that was a disturbance to other people. He did not take or use money. He did not depend on money, although he was starving until he almost could not stand. He continued his trip with a send of tenderness and joy in discovering something beautiful that could be encountered in the convenient living like today.

In this seminar, Pramuan shared his life experience he had in various incidents of violence, which enabled him to find genuine happiness from applying religious teachings and faith as tools in searching for answers and solution to violence emerging in heart. In particular, he was aware that violence and division into various factions in society were resulted from fear and distrust in the heart of individuals that led to hatred that each faction had against the other. Various stories shared by Pramuan helped the

participants to reflect the way of peace and calmness, which has to start first within the heart of each one before extending it to other people.

52 persons who were priests and religious sisters from different men and women religious congregations, personnel of Church organizations under the Bishops' Conference and Catholic schools, took part in this seminar and benefit from sharing of the resource persons.



Sisters and personnel from the Catholic Bishops' Conference were interested and asked questions to the resource person.

Collaboration with Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) in organizing a workshop on 'Responding to Climate Change: The Challenge of Adaptation and Mitigation for Thai Tourism' .

On September 25, 2008, a workshop has been organized at Assumption Human Development Center, St. Gabriel Foundation to understand global climate change, especially the global warming resulted from tourism industry. This climate change affected the whole environment, such as richness of the sea and ocean, soil erosion, migration and extinction of life forms. The workshop also recommended direction for improvement to foster environmental friendly tourism. The participants also recommended dissemination of information to the public on the occasion of World Tourism Day to be marked on September 27, 2008. In total 22 persons from state agencies and non-government organizations involved in tourism took part in this workshop.



▲ Mr. Rungrote Tangsurakit (third from left) from Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT), the organizer.



▲ Resource Person - Mr. Tara Buakhamsri from Green Peace Southeast Asia.



◀ Participants.

Field Survey in the South on July 8-10, 2008. (Ranong, Phangnga and Phuket)

This activity is part of a project in close collaboration with Diocesan Social Action Center (DISAC), Suratthani Diocese, to study the work of various organizations working with foreign workers, organizing center of learning for children of foreign workers in fishery, construction and rubber plantation, and also Muslim Thai who were affected by Tsunami. The survey enabled CCJP to identify activities that could be implemented together, such as legal training on rights of workers for staff of DISAC to enable to disseminate the knowledge further to Burmese workers, most of whom do not have work permit. CCJP could also recruit volunteers. For example, interested volunteers from the human rights camp for youth could help teach in center of learning. It can also organize exposure visit for the fourth year major seminarians of Lux Mundi to this area. It is also possible to organize consultation or workshop for teachers in schools which enrolled Burmese children. It still requires mutual planning with DISAC of Suratthani to plan these activities in details.



Talking with organizations working with Burmese workers (left), at Stigmatine Center under the care of Fr. Suppawuthi Sopakhaynag (right) Marist Mission Father, Ranong.



Visit to fishing community and Tha Klang Daycare center in Suksamran District, Ranong.



Burmese children in the Learning Center operated by Jesuit Relief Service (JRS).



Field visit to Burmese community in Ranong.

The fourth human rights camp for youth organised at Energy Ashram, Pakchong District, Nakhonratchasima, on October 1- 4, 2008.



Young people taking part in activities of Energy Ashram in producing biodiesel from used vegetable oil.

In total, 36 children in grade 4-6 of secondary education and the first year of vocational education from 15 educational institutions in Bangkok and provinces (6 Catholic schools and 9 public schools), took part in this camp. In this camp, they have learned about human dignity and rights and child rights from various activities, such as needs assessment, station on route to human rights and exposure visit. They have learned and took part in activities of Energy Ashram. For example, they have learned process of making high efficiency charcoal in a 200 liter oil drum, production of biodiesel from used vegetable oil, dishwashing soap from plants, study method of making solar thermo-energy. They also learned how to save energy in building and their role in building good environment for society.

This human rights camp for youth helped the participating children to understand human and child rights at a satisfactory degree. This could be seen in workshops and presentation in each activity. Interest and participation of the children was at a good level. They have expressed that they were impressed with and learned very much from this camp, which made them changed in many areas, especially their attitude towards people around them, friends, family and society. They promised to apply this knowledge and experience in their daily life and extend it further to society.



Preparing Vegetable garden.



Practising on making dishwashing soap from plants.



Human Rights Camp for Ethnic Youth was organized on September 26-28, 2008 at Don Bosco Home, Doi Saket District, Chiangmai Province.



Ethnic Young people took part in activity at the station on universal human rights.



Activity at the station on illusion.

This human rights camp was organized for 47 children from 6 ethnic groups (Karen, Akha, Lahu, Hmong, Mien and Lawa) and also lowland youth under the care of Don Bosco Home, Chiangmai operated by Salesian Foundation of Thailand. This camp aimed at helping the youth to learn human dignity and rights from various activities, such as needs assessment, station on route to human rights, etc. They have learned rights of ethnic peoples as provided by international declaration on rights of ethnic peoples. They have learned that responsibility comes side by side with rights as all human being have their own rights and one has to be responsible to make sure other people also get their rights. In addition, they also have to be responsible towards society and people around. These young people were able to give good presentation. For example, they shared that people have to show responsibility with rights in choosing partners and build their families. In other words, they have to be in fidelity. When there is right to education, one has the responsibility to pay attention to their study and listen to their parents. When there is right to privacy, one has to avoid violating personal rights of other people, etc. In this camp, the youth were interested and took part in all activities, including in workshops and presentation to plenary session. This showed that they have understood what they have learned and been aware of due responsibility.

Training on Human Rights Education at Assumption College Sriracha on September 14, 2008.

School administrator of Assumption College Sriracha, which is a Catholic school under St. Gabriel Congregation, realized the importance of teaching human rights in school. Therefore, he supported training on human rights education for 290 teachers at kindergarten to secondary education, including other staff members and mentors working in the school. The aim of this training was to provide knowledge and promote understanding and awareness on human rights leading to respect to human rights and values in educational institution. After the training, these teachers have understood contents of human rights, such as origin of human rights, international declaration on human rights, child rights and human rights in educational institution.



Director of Assumption College Sriracha, gives an opening address.



Mr. Pitak Gerdhom, a resource person, gives input on 'Basic Foundation of Human Rights'.



Associate Professor Dr. Walai Na Pombejr, chairperson of CCJP on human rights education program gives input on 'Human Rights in Educational Institutions'.



Mr. Nuttawut Buapratoom, a resource person from Center for the Protection of Children's Right Foundation.

Social Practicum : Study of Social Problems and Social Apostolate through Exposure-immersion program organised for the fourth year seminarians and women religious from Lux Mundi Major Seminary on October 12-28, 2008.



Bishop Bunluen Mansap shares on 'Search and Application in the Life'.



This group of seminarians visited Moklen community helping them to cut firewood.



Religious sisters taking part in exposure-immersion in Muslim fishing community.



Another group is with workers at fish pier.

CCJP has organized an exposure-immersion program 2008 for 46 fourth year students in Philosophy and Religion Department of Lux Mundi Major Seminary. They were 38 major seminarians and 8 women religious. The objective was to help these students to study and gain better understanding on current social reality, which would help them to gain social awareness on various problems that were parts of their future life and pastoral care. This exposure-immersion also helped them to apply knowledge on social teachings of the church they have learned to explain social phenomena, which would help them to get clearer understanding and practical guidelines.

This exposure-immersion program was hosted by social pastoral center of Suratthani (DISAC Suratthani) at Taguapa District, Phangnga. Regarding the process, all participants were divided into 12 groups to live in communities of Burmese workers who worked in fishery, rubber plantation and construction, and in communities of Thai displaced people, Muslim communities and Moklen in Ranong, Phangnga and Phuket Provinces. The exposure-immersion program took 3 days and nights with one more day for final reflection on the experience they gained from the exposure-immersion.

During the reflection at the end of this exposure-immersion program after spend a few days with foreign workers and ethnic people, the participants, both seminarians and women religious expressed that they have experienced suffering and dignified livelihood in the midst of this suffering of Burmese workers. It reaffirmed and strengthened their vocation as religious. They said they could apply knowledge and understanding on social teachings learned in class as foundation for reflection when they lived in community to study reality of the people and problems they were facing.



The seminarians are experiencing sweat and tiredness in construction work.



Taking group photo with CCJP team and DISAC Suratthani.

Workshop on 'Building Sustainable Peace: Our Approach to Learning' was co-organized with Caritas Italiana and DISAC Suratthani on November 18-21, 2008.

This workshop was organized for personnel of CCJP and DISAC Suratthani, comprising of priests, religious sisters and laity, including foreign volunteers working in the South, total 22 people. The resource person in this workshop was Julie Morgan from Franciscan International, with Ms. Katalee Sikharangura from Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples (ACPP) transiting into Thai language throughout the whole process.

This workshop helped the participants to learn basic skill in organizing peace building workshop. They have learned religious teachings and concepts as the foundation for training on peace building and conflict confrontation. In this workshop, each participant shared that they have changed the way they thought and felt and their behaviour on conflict, which is a basis to approach peace in human person. They have also developed skill as practical guidelines to work with rights and peace networks in the future.



Julie Morgan, a resource person in the workshop.



Katalee Sikharangura (in black shirt wearing glass) from ACPP helps interpret input into Thai language for the participants.



Staff of CCJP and Suratthani Diocese in activity of the workshop process.



Taking group photo.

Interfaith Prayer for Peace in Thailand with Buddhist, Muslim and Christian Faithful in front of Bangkok Art Gallery at Pathumwan Junction.

On December 2, 2008, Buddhist and Muslim faithful and Christians represented by Jesuit priest and Ursuline sisters, staff of CCJP and peace loving Christians, and other people, altogether 150, joined in a prayer for peace in Thailand. This event was organized by 'Popular Network to End Civil War' at an open ground in front of Bangkok Art Gallery, Pathumwan Junction.

This event started with a sermon by Venerable Maha Wutthichai Vachiramethi (Wor Wachiramethi) under the topic 'All Thai people are Brothers and Sisters'. He said truly human being had potential to love people in the whole world. Yet, they held tight to their belonging, ideology, political adherence and religious belief, and saw that others who were different were not their friends or do not belong to their group, which hindered people from loving each other despite the fact that we were all human beings, breathing the same air with the same foundation of loving happiness and hating suffering. The most important is human heart, the most high and the most low, narrow or open depending on our hearts. We Thai people must open wide our hearts, look wider, think farther. We should accept opinions that were different from ours, with different belief from ours, and we would live together in peace. Do not allow violence from the misled hearts until it became culture.



Jesuit priest and Ursuline sisters and staff of CCJP join in an interfaith prayer for peace in Thailand.

Misled heart was that when we saw that other people who had different ideas did not belong to our group. Let us think peacefully, talk peacefully, do peacefully and be confident in non-violence, and refuse violence that might lead to injury and death.



Ms. Angkhana Neelapaijit, wife of the late lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit, a human right advocate who has disappeared without knowing his whereabouts.

Ms. Angkhana Neelapaijit, wife of the late lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit (human right advocate who disappeared without knowing of his whereabouts) was a Muslim representative in this event. She shared that all people confessed different beliefs or religions that had teaching against violation to right to body, life and property. If all were confident and had faith in religion, they must follow religious teachings. All religions spoke about peace. Yet, due to ignorance, lack of understanding, anger or whatever, people were made to lose their conscience, allowing evil to dominate them. How could we do to motivate people to regain their conscience and study and practise their religious teachings? Now, everyone was in the same condition of falling victim of violence, whichever faction they belonged. Every time we faced violence, we should have the clear attitude of protest and disagreement. Religious faithful must play this role, opening up wider space for peace. Being religious faithful, sole prayer was not



Venerable Wutthichai Vachiramethi, a renowned Buddhist preacher in Thailand is giving a sermon on 'All Thai People Are Brothers and Sisters'.

enough, but one had to witness their true stand and finally pray together for the return of peace.

"As for me, I have been infected by violence. Today, I do not feel safe. I am not secured in my life. Yet, our life has to go on by firmly holding religious teachings without being instrument of anyone. Regarding forgiveness, we have stick to righteousness that would lead to forgiveness because anger, vengeance and killing will finally lead to unending violence that could not be stopped. This violence will affect our family, community and society until no one could find peace."

At the end, all peace lovers lighted candles to ask for peace to emerge in Thai society, demanding sacrifice from all factions to go back one step without resorting to violence so as to avoid civil war. They also demanded the government to dissolve the Parliament and return the power to the people so that the country would regain peace.



Non-violence advocate and people light candles and pray for peace in Thai society.

Of Thousand of Words, Images and Impression.

In the current situation in Thailand, although we have got a new prime minister whose name is Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of Democrat Party, Thai society continues to experience conflict and factions between yellow and red shirts.

'Reflection on Violence in Thai Society in 2008' written by Sam Sor might help the readers to understand political and social situation in Thailand at present well through reflection of events in the past six months.

All activities implemented by CCJP in June-December 2008 documented in this JP E-Newsletter can help readers to know our stand in ongoing work for human rights, justice and peace.

Thailand : Reflection on Society of Violence in 2008

By Triple S (CCJP)

In the year 2006, Thai society has learned about 'yellow colour', one of the main colors in Arts. Yellow is a symbol color of the king of Thailand. Society at that moment was a contemporary society paying homage to the King who is the main idol of citizens whose human dignity has been robbed by capitalism through money politics. At that moment, no one has ever thought that the contemporary current of wearing yellow shirt would give a model of identity creation to various organizations which have their own t-shirt in different colors so much so that sweat shops sewing clothes made a lot of fortune from this current.

The tactic of using yellow color to unite people in the country with the goal of strengthening monarchism on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of accession was highly successful. At the same time, when there was a political change with political conflict resulted from the discourse of rejection to Thaksin administration, yellow color has been added with a meaning as armor of psychological protection from demonstrators in monitoring and auditing administration of nominee government of the former Prime Minister Thaksin. At the end, the yellow mass has got its opponent of red side who supported the then government. However, the political tension, especially conflict that has burst out into violence though the yellow side declared to hold on non-violence (finally attached to prejudice and narrow mindset), has accelerated this conflict to expand further. Each side mobilized the mass with an eye for an eye approach to fulfill their own ideology.



image : www.thaifreenews.com

However, before the yellow color was used as a symbol for this ideological struggle, Thai society in the past 3 years has opened up more to political reality. There was monitoring and auditing by mobile forums criticizing politics. Although some groups would be aware that behind these critiques at the government and its performances there was a personal conflict of business interest. When analytical information on reality of money politics has been made public more and more, especially its impacts on popular sector through the totalitarian democracy, the personal conflict between the anchorman of the program "Thailand Weekly Mobile Program" (Muang Thai Rai Supda Sanjorn) and the then leader of the country was overlooked because new knowledge publicized each week was more interesting.

Later, bureaucracy joined hands with military to stage a coup in September 2006. Instead of being able to eliminate the totalitarian leader, it was like cutting a branch, which later a new branch sprang out when a new general election was held and a new Thaksin's nominee government has been reinstated. Different problems of corruption, dishonesty, manipulation of the people through various policies reemerged and seemed to be worse. New branches which were business people who took turn to be ministers and were enthusiastic to initiate new projects for rewards from the people's tax and reclaimed more vested interests rather than coordinate and drive the whole organ of the society. This situation has been a factor accelerating a new mobilization of popular sector based on the power of yellow

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color while monitoring and auditing of government performance was more intensive. However, this mobilization and seizure of several important places by the yellow alliance called People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) have given important lessons to Thai society at present. It started with a platform of news and information dissemination revealing facts to society, while public media could not fully do. In addition, this critique on government's performance was anew and came out continuously because it came from knowledge of the move within the structure of the government, which was essential information for ongoing auditing.

At the beginning of 2008, the new government came from a general election. The government actually composed of only a few active ministers from the whole cabinet. During the time of this government, there was a problem of dealing of the minister of foreign affairs in the case of Preah Vihear, which has provoked conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. This dealing has led to disclosure of misdeed and vested interest, which has turned the move of PAD from opting for non-violence abruptly into political force. PAD later has tried to create discourse of "new politics creator". However, what was gradually surfaced side by side with dissemination

of information was provocation of sentiment of the mass through militants and political musicians. Le Bon, a French social scientist who is the author of 'The Crowd' explained atmosphere of movement that demonstrators were different in occupations, knowledge, personality or social status. When they joined a demonstration, they would be changed by the immediate environment of the mobilisers uniting them into one spirit, one emotion, as well as expressing themselves in a fashion that each one of them used to do differently before.

If we look at the emerged phenomenon together with social context we find that society yearns for refuge and leaders (we do not deny that Thai society is leadership dependent). It is not proper for anyone to take advantage of the situation of political confusion to build leadership for one's self or one's faction, although it would be a new alternative for Thai political society. What we saw in during the 193 days of demonstration, each leader of PAD has used his/her personality including provocative words to agitate emotion of audience who sat attentively at the demonstration ground, listening to repeated words which penetrated into their conscience, as well as audience at home watching ASTV on air 24 hours a day, such as 'Is it true, isn't it?', 'Yes?, No?',



image : s39.photobucket.com

'Please respond', etc., followed by the loud active response from the audience together with the shaking of clapping hand toys unceasingly. It was even coupled with the fashion of collecting t-shirts, scarf or badges, which spread to allies in other social sectors, and was part of the symbol of intentional side taking. It looks as if it were celebration of religious ritual. There was provocation with frequent repeated response. At the end, the audience was trapped under their own conscience. There was no need for reason, and people could be mobilized, especially women who were the majority in the demonstration (and who were supporters with influence at the back of this demonstration). From the human social psychological perspective, they were ready to follow.

Regarding the expressed behavior, Le Bon said that provocation and leading during demonstration could make individual to lose their reasons and sense of morality and create a 'collective mind'. This is a status of emotion that is beyond reality. Furthermore, at the end there was like an epidemic. It was a situation where members of the demonstration agree to follow instruction of leaders of the demonstration or rally.

At the late stage, leaders always did opposite to what they said that the demonstration was non-violence. They spoke bad, rude, impolite, aggressive words and cursed the opposite side that they viewed as their enemy. They compared their enemy as different types of animals, reflecting that they themselves



image : www.thairath.co.th

บรรชารักษ์ในท่าเียบ รัฐบาล ที่เมืองนนทบุรีด้วยผู้ชุมนุมกลุ่มพันธมิตร ที่นัดรวมเลื้อยเหลืองก้นฟ้าฟุ้งปราศรัย ส่วนที่วัดสวนแก้ว จ. นนทบุรี ซึ่งมีการจัดรายการความครึ้งวันไน้บจรเป็นถาวรรวมพลคนเสื้อแดง ที่ดูเหมือนจะยั นคนละพวก แต่ต่างก็โบกธงไตรรงค์เหมือนกัน

had immoral behaviours that provoked demonstrators on the streets and those in front of TV screens at homes to share collective mind. For instance, when a leader instructed the demonstrators to take a rest late at night for the next day move to another place, audience at home also shut down their TV sets and went to bed as instructed. Many people overlooked verbal violence and the arrogant emotion of demonstration leaders. They said they only listened to the core message spoken by the leaders. Yet, it is a promotion of serious violation of rights as human being of other members of society, although each and every religion has a teaching on this matter. The first precept in Buddhism teaches human being to respect rights and body of other people. Christianity also teaches on the love of neighbours. Although there was not physical assault, but it created the wound of hatred in the heart of other side. It was a drive for mobilization of opposition as seen in the Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (DAAD) mobilizing mass to protest the demonstration led by PAD. At the end, society has learned that in the war the grassroots mass suffer. They were instrument of a complex fight of the two poles of power between monarchism and bureaucracy against neo-capitalism, both of which have been manipulating the mass as their instrument.

Although the lesson on this move for political change has contributed significantly provided opportunity for several groups of people to understand their role in political participation, individuals were courageous to monitor and audit rather than entrusting this task to parliamentary representatives. Nevertheless, we have also found that in this political transition there is still ideological struggle of differences in ideology professed by each group of the people. There was also the level

of unequal access, knowledge and understanding on information and news, which was also coupled with the question of nationalism, regionalism, patriotic Chinese Thais, northerners, Thaksin lovers, etc. Furthermore, mass media also helped intensely accelerate this conflict and division, as they repeatedly presented new on this fight and conflict or only prejudice of one side against the other. In presenting the picture of reality, such as policy pointing their teargas guns at the demonstrators or the fight between people of the two colors, mass media benefited ads from this presentation while TV audience had hatred in return. There was sample of conflict emerging in family institution since husband and wife did not share the same opinion, mother and children took different sides. Faithful of different religions have their life in separated secular from sacred. Christians who joined the demonstration of either PAD or DAAD also had prejudice against their neighbours who had other opinion than their own, looking at those people as someone else not belonging to their group. They have disseminated this idea among faithful. The question is then 'what is the authentic action of faith according to religious teaching?'



In other countries, conflicts, violence or civil war are mainly erupted from difference in race and religion. However, in Thai society conflict in



image : thai-peopleblogspot.com

ideology and opinion (actually there was the issue of power as the key factor) had come in and destroyed the atmosphere of unity among faithful of different religions, although there was a repeated saying that 'religious teaching has to be the holding principle providing answer and solution to different problems'. Pope Benedict XVI teaching on political participation in the modern era challenges Thai society when political ideology serves vested interest and manipulates interest based reason to deviate social justice. Then, what Christians should do to help clean political reasons. They should analyse the situation to find out what are behind this phenomenon of conflict, who benefited or lost from it, how grassroots people were used as instruments, and what would be long term effects. Beside, how we, as audience of various media, use our intellect and wisdom to search for truth from the news we have heard or watched, or we just made our judgment with our emotion and emotion as the word of Le Bon.