

## **Continuous progress made on the Thai Government's reconciliation plan**

Following Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's public inauguration of the national reform process under the Government's reconciliation plan on 10 June 2010, a public forum was convened on 17 June 2010 as a brainstorming session on how to move the process forward. Organised by the Pattanathai Foundation in cooperation with the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the Office of the National Health Committee, the Office of the Thai Health Promotion Fund and their network of civil society organisations, the event was attended by over 500 participants from civil society organizations, academia, the private sector, local administrative bodies and government agencies.

The participants discussed various proposals encompassing both substantive issues that should be addressed in the reform – such as economic, social and educational disparities, national resources management and distribution with local participation in the decision making processes, education reform, issues related to children and youths, corruption and public participation in political reform and reform of the media – and mechanisms and processes for national reform, including the need to enable all sides to participate, the setting up of funds and committees at national and regional levels to ensure continuation of the effort, as well as the roles of the Government and Parliament in translating proposals from the civil society sector into laws and public policies.

According to the Prime Minister, the views gathered during this public forum reflect visions for both the Thai people and society and were in line with those of the Government. These would, among others, enable the Thai people to enjoy a better quality of life and human dignity, to live a secured life amidst changes and volatility of globalization with basic rights provided, to have opportunities for advancement in terms of livelihood, work and education, and to ensure that Thailand be a democratic and just society with rules whereby people can live together in harmony and respect differences and diversities. Noting that work to address all these issues would take time, the Prime Minister stressed that a mechanism to steer this process should be able to operate beyond this Government's term. In this connection, two things must be clear – the process and timeframe for such a mechanism, which he suggested could be three years, and the role that the Government should take. With regard to the latter, he reiterated that a national survey would be conducted leading to the formulation of a blueprint specifying details of actions to be taken, timeframes and the budget before the end of 2010. This blueprint notwithstanding, other efforts that are ready to proceed independently could proceed.

Subsequently on 18 June 2010, the Prime Minister met former prime minister Anand Panyarachun and Dr. Prawes Wasi, whose names were nominated by civil society to lead the national reform effort. Both agreed to take on the mission, which – as they underlined when talking to the press after the said meeting – would be civil society-driven, independent from the Government and forward-looking.

In this regard, two committees will be set up by end of June. The first committee, to be chaired by Mr. Anand and comprising 15-20 eminent persons, will focus on strategies and priorities for reform to be proposed to the Government, including short-term policies and measures which can be implemented immediately and longer-term ones which require approval from Parliament or other bodies. The first set of proposals could be done within six months. The second committee, to be chaired by Dr. Prawes, will work on national reform assembly which will, among others, serve as a channel for all sector of society to put forward their views and proposals, and synthesise these with academic works so as to formulate proposals for the Government.

Furthermore, progress has been made with regard to political reform and constitutional amendments. The committee of 19 academics, chaired by Professor Dr. Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, held its first meeting on 17 June 2010, during which Prime Minister Abhisit affirmed that the committee would be given full independence in carrying out its tasks without government interference. The committee will work on three main issues, namely: 1) constitutional amendments based on the six recommendations put forward by the parliamentary committee working on these matters as well as additional issues; 2) strengthening of the democratic political system; and 3) promotion of public participation in these processes, which would include public hearings on constitutional amendments, as well as communications to promote public understanding on relevant issues. In this regard, it has set up three sub-committees to work on each of these issues. The Committee is expected to submit its initial proposals to the Government in October 2010.

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