ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

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INTRODUCTION

State to state relations could not solve any conflicts in the Southeast Asian region. Alternative ways and means of alleviating the stresses and distresses on the civilian populations of Southern Thailand which is affected by the conflicts must be found, especially in face of the prospects — and dangers — of the spillover of the conflict across national borders within the region. Alternative ASEAN regionalism in the form of civil society cooperation, therefore, should be explored as part of the means of tackling the conflict afflicting the region. This paper attempts to assess the present role and contributions of civil society, and to foresee the prospects of greater civil society involvement, and finally to suggest ways in which that involvement can take place. Using primary such as interview with activists of civil society in the region, and secondary data, this paper finds that local civil societies have taken their roles in mobilizing the masses and awakening their awareness on their own rights and obligation as citizens, and in educating them on the national laws. As a result, this paper argues that civil society cooperation in the Southeast Asian region may function as an alternative regionalism in conflict resolution in the region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In conflict resolution, the three steps are important to be pursued in order to reconcile the conflicting parties, namely peace making, peace keeping, and peace building. This paper attempts to deploy these three steps in adopting the role of civil society in conflict resolution in Southern Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature. It attempts to describe and analyze the potential role of civil society which has been represented by internal non-governmental organization within the conflict territories i.e. Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, and its counter partners from outside the territories i.e. Bangkok, and international civil society which are mostly came from Malaysia and Indonesia. Data collected for this study was based on field research conducted during December 2010. Beside secondary data driven from news papers, documents and books as well as journal articles that were published, the author interviewed many members of local NGOs which emerged after 2007.

Having investigated several potential alternatives to end the conflict, the author argued that only by stirring local People’s direction to socio-economic and political development, that the conflicting parties could be reconciled.
DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Continuous conflict in Southern Thailand was, commonly believed, due to the lack of unity among the long-standing separatist groups in one hand, and the lack of serious intention of the Thai government on the other. No official agency can really claim a sole mandate to carry out a peace process, not even the Army, because a significant number of hardliners in the military do not like the idea of talking to the enemy (Don Pathan, 2011).

Although Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur facilitated the peaceful resolution between the separatist groups and the Thai army, the efforts failed. As highlighted by Pathan, that during the Surayud administration, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, as well as European countries were asked to help. They were seen as credible partners and were asked to take a direct role in facilitating meetings with the separatists. Surayud thought it made sense to work with the international community, especially countries where many of the old guards were exiled.

Then the following administrations - from Samak Sundaravej to Abhisit - pushed foreign governments and international bodies away. In addition, the Abhisit government against the Surayud's hands-on approach and told the rest of the world that the Southern Thailand was an internal matter. Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya may have publicly thanked Kuala Lumpur for supposedly informing Thailand about the Organization of Islamic Conference's (OIC) initiatives on the Southern Thailand, after news about their meeting with the old guard went public late last year. But no one who followed the issue closely believed what he said. They saw his statement as a face-saving measure. This is because the Thai government does not want outsiders to get involved in the Southern Thai conflict (Pathan, 2011).

In addition, as a member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Thailand has right to bring the issue of non-interference policy, which is able to stop other countries in the region intervene in Thailand domestic affairs. i.e. domestic conflict. As a result, this paper argues that non-governmental organizations are paramount importance in three processes, namely peace making, peace keeping, and peace building. As peace maker, local civil society may facilitate to wake people's awareness on the significance of security and mutual trust between the separatist groups and the Thai government.

Furthermore, local civil society in Southern Thailand and other civil society in Bangkok should establish a network that can cooperate in convincing respective parties, especially separatist groups in the south and the Thai government in Bangkok, to ensure there will no violence and physical war between both parties. Conflict avoidance must be observed by the two parties. Finally, local civil societies should also have network with other civil society from outside the Thailand. This outside network may help local civil society to enhance their capabilities and facilitate the local civil society in engaging people from Southern Thailand in three significant fields: education, welfare distribution and political representation.
CONCLUSION

In Short it is clear that government-to-government relations within the Southeast Asian region has been failed in bringing the Southern Thai conflict into the end. Third party, who is not bound by non-interference principle, is only mass-to-mass relations. In this regards, Non-Governmental organization (civil society) is relevant party to awake the people's awareness, especially, Thai government leaders and People in the Southern Thailand. Civil society may function as peace builders which could be able to educate respective parties on the significance of education that may help on reconcile the common interest especially on Southern Thailand people's recognition and representation in Socio-economic and political scenario in Southern Thailand.

REFERENCES

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