

Report of Activities 2018

(January – December 2018)



By

Religions for Peace, Thailand

Secretariat Office: Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP),
Mahidol University

Report of Activities 2018

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Project duration: January- December 2018

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Executive Summary

Religions for Peace Thailand has since 2009 embarked on the mission of mobilizing religious leaders and members of religious communities to work in the area of conflict transformation and peacebuilding for Thai society. Thailand's Southern Unrest has been marked as the key targeted area for *RfP* activities, which have largely been 1) intra and interreligious dialogues, 2) fieldtrips to learn about peaceful coexistence, and 3) youth camps. There are also the 5 religions praying and peace walks (*dhammayattra*) aiming at raising awareness among Thais that violent means was not a proper solution for the contracted political conflict between the yellow and red shirt groups. Since 2009 *RfP* Thailand has its secretariat office set up at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP), Mahidol University and a group of academic and supporting staff of IHRP has been the one who executes the tasks and activities of *RfP*-IRC Thailand.

In 2018 responding to the international trend on enhancing roles, participation, and engagement of women and youth in the policy decision concerning peace and security, Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand (*RfP*-IRC Thailand) decided to increase its activities regarding these two target groups who are also key stakeholders of the violent and protracted conflict in Thailand's three southernmost provinces. It organized a three-day interreligious and inter group (youths-women) dialogue at the C.S. Pattani. The dialogue was aimed 1) to help the women and youth groups in the network of Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand develop better understanding of the current situations of women and youths in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand; 2) to further enhance the capacity of these women and youth and equip them with knowledge and skills crucial for becoming agents for change for conflict transformation in the southern border provinces and 3) to initiate interaction for long-term relationship between the Women of Faith for Peace and the youth group in Religions for Peace Thailand's network in order for them to learn and share as well as to work together in the future. 17 women and 23 youths from the network of Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand attended the activity from 24-26 August 2018.

Dialogue process proved to be suitable for two groups to engage actively and constructively with one another and to learn from one another's experiences. Both groups learned to reflect on themselves and on others as well as to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and challenges they, as conflict transformers, will likely face in the future. This analysis will help them to be better prepared for their roles in the future. The exchange between participants and IRC committee members on the last day was also a means for communicating needs, fear, concerns of the local people to those living outside the area. The 2018 key achievement of *RfP* Thailand lies in its ability to establish *Youths of Faith for Peace network* from this three-day dialogue and to enhance roles and visibility of IRC Thailand committee members in the conflict transformation of the South.

Report of Activities

A. **Interreligious Dialogue on Women and Youths of Faith for Peace, *RfP*-IRC Thailand** (August 24th-26th, 2018 at the C.S. Pattani Hotel, Pattani, Thailand)

1. Rationale and background of the activities:

Responding to the international trend on enhancing roles, participation, and engagement of women and youth in the policy decision concerning peace and security, Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand (*RfP*-IRC Thailand) decided to increase its activities regarding these two target groups who are also key stakeholders of the violent and protracted conflict in Thailand's three southernmost provinces. During the period of 2004-2014, 81 children and youth under 15 years of age had lost their lives and 445 of them sustained minor injuries while 431 women had died and 1,651 of them injured.¹ The causes of these deaths were from deadly injuries from bomb explosions and being shot in the public. According to the Interpreter's report on 10th October 2014, 460 women were killed and in July 2014 alone, 9 women were among the victims of the violent incidents.²

Apart from being victims of direct violence themselves, the women and children in the south are also affected when their male family members are victims of the direct violence. According to Isranews since 2004-2011, more than 2,200 women lost their husbands from the violent incidents, while 4,700 children became orphans. According to the latest Deep South Watch's report in 2016, from 4th January 2004 to 30th September 2015, 9,806 children had lost their parents from the insurgency in the southern border provinces and became orphans.³ Losing either husband or children from the insurgency, the women have inevitably become a breadwinner, taking care of their family members. The children and youth who lost their parents from the insurgency can no longer live a normal life as do other children. They need to drop out of school and find a job to support their siblings or the elders in the family. The women and youth in the southern border have been facing a hardship and in need of help.

In recent years, the women and youth groups in the southern border provinces started to realize their role in creating positive changes. They have realized that apart from being a victim of the violence, they are key stakeholders of the conflict. Since they are inside the conflicted story, they are able to work and cooperate with one another to express their opinions, needs as well as the solution to permanently end the violence in the southern border.

In 2012-2017, some women and youth in the southern border have altered their roles from waiting for assistance from the government/private sectors and sitting outside the conflict

¹ https://www.khaosod.co.th/view_newsonline.php?newsid=1448446593 Accessed on 10th May 2018

² <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/religion-southern-thailand-conflict> Accessed on 11 May 2017

³ https://www.southdeepoutlook.com/ShowAllDetails/detail_south_editorial/87/ Accessed on 8th May 2018

transformation to key actors. In their attempt towards a positive change, there are working groups such as the establishment of Peace Agenda of Women on 28th April 2015 which begins by campaigning to call for the perpetrators to stop violent actions against the vulnerable groups which are children, women, priest of any religion and the elder. The group also advocates to have safe zones in the southern border provinces and push for a truth examination of the deaths of civilians and authorities in the dreadful incidents. Moreover, in 2016 the women group in the southern border has tried to urge the government to realize the importance of women in building and supporting the national peace and security, thus the government should protect women rights and bring justice to women as well as encourage them to participate in the peace process and social security.⁴ The works of women in the southern border as agents for change complies with Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security agenda issued by the UN Security Council in 2000 which is accepted and applied to enhance the role of women in conflict transformation, peace and security.⁵

In regard to youth in the southern border, the young people have taken a role as a main actor of the conflict in the past 7-8 years. The young started to see themselves not only as victims of violence or perpetrators or troublemakers of the society.⁶ They can agglomerate to reflect their desires, problems, and suggestions they deem appropriate to tackle with the conflict in the southern border provinces. In the past decade, there were several youth associations such as Peaceful of Southern Boundary's Organization (POSBO) which is developed from the Peaceful Students Network of Prince of Songkla University, Pattani province (founded in 2008), Federation of Patani Students and Youth (PerMAS) which is developed from Federation of Students in the Southern Border Provinces in 2013, and Dream South which was also founded in 2013. Although each group is supported by different organizations, having different working directions, and having diverse prospects toward the future of the southern border provinces, these youth groups have played a crucial role in boosting the role of youth in peacebuilding in the southern border provinces. In order to make their works more concrete, they still need substantive supports from the state. While the women are able to associate under the Peace Agenda of Women, there is no attempt to encourage the youth to have a similar status like the women group, albeit the attempt in international arena since 2015 to support the youth's role in policy decision concerning peace and security.⁷

Owing to the efforts of the women groups and the youth's role in the conflict transformation and the support from the public, private and civil society sectors in the past 3-4

⁴ Summarized from https://www.southdeepoutlook.com/ShowAllDetails/detail_south_editorial/87/ Accessed on 8th May 2018

⁵ See Klot (2007) http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pdf/doc_wgl/wgl_backgroundpaper_29_01_08.pdf and UN Secretary-General Report (2010) http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/466 Accessed on 11 May 2017

⁶ Suphatmet Yunyasit (2015: 18-20) compiled a number of researches which mentioned the youth in the southern border as troublemakers of the society such as being a drug-addicted, racing car at night including being perpetrators themselves. These images are socially constructed which might not fit the reality or not comply with the way the youth in the southern border see themselves.

⁷ See more <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/12/un-security-council-adopts-historic-resolution-on-youth-peace-and-security/> Accessed on 8th May 2018

years, the women, and youth groups have more rooms to express their desire, fear, horrible experiences and suggestions to terminate the conflict. However, the capacity building of women and youth groups including opening space for women and youth from different religions and ethnicities to interact, exchange opinions and work together still need to be more encouraged.

Additionally, it is found that in the past years there is no concrete attempt of the corporation between the women groups and the youth groups, despite its capacity and shared experiences in many aspects. Therefore, *RfP* Thailand sees the need to organize dialogue activity for women of faith and youth for peace in the southern border provinces in order to develop their capacity to be agents for positive changes in the conflicted situation and push forward the cooperation between both populations.

2. Objectives of the dialogues

- 2.1 To learn about the current situations of women and youths in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand. These two groups of stakeholders are represented by a group of selected participants (17 women and 23 youths) from the network of Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand
- 2.2 To further enhance the capacity of the women and youth groups in the network of Religions for Peace -Interreligious Council of Thailand and equip them with knowledge and skills crucial for becoming agents for change for conflict transformation in the southern border provinces.
- 2.3 To initiate interaction for long-term relationship between the Women of Faith for Peace and the youth group in Religions for Peace Thailand's network in order for them to learn and share as well as to work together in the future

3. Participants: 17 women and 23 youths

Participants are women and youths from three southernmost provinces and nearby province within the southern region. For the women group, *RfP* Thailand invited members of Religions for Peace's *Women of Faith for Peace* and some other potential female leaders of organizations or networks known for their development and peace-building works. For the youth participants, without its own youth wing *RfP* Thailand had invited youths who are of three southernmost provinces. These youths either have been acting as leaders of key youth peace-building associations, network, and organizations or are actively involved in the socio-cultural and peace-building activities organized by their universities. These youths will later be invited to join *RfP* Thailand as members of its youth wing: *Youths of Faith for Peace*.

4. Process and outcomes of the two and a half day interreligious and intergroup dialogue

The 3-day activity was earlier designed to be two separate interreligious dialogues—one for the members of *RfP*-IRC Thailand's Women of Faith for Peace and the other for the youths who would be named members of the newly established *RfP*-IRC Thailand's Youths of Faith for Peace—which run concurrently for 2 days and a day intergroup women-youths dialogue. However, the organizer team decided to change the process and create more opportunity for interaction for the two target groups by combining two dialogues. From the first day the participants from both groups had interacted with one another through various relationship building/ice-breaking activities. They later engaged in activities allowing them to reflect on themselves and their roles as agents for change for the Unrest. There was only a session on the second day of the 3-day dialogue in which they were separated in order to brainstorm for their own future projects.

The activities IHRP facilitator team organized during the 3-day event were as follows:

August 24th

➤ *Getting to know oneself and others*

After informing the participants about the objectives of the 3-day intergroup dialogue and setting ground rules for dialogue, the facilitator team from IHRP, Mahidol University asked the participants to introduce themselves and to choose a type of animal/object best representing their sense of self. Participants would sketch a simple frame of the selected animal and tell the group the traits of the animal that they think could best represent their personalities. Ms. Monthipa Yimyong was the leading facilitator of this session.

Outcomes:

- This activity was fun and served well as ice-breaking activity for participants that differ both in terms of age, gender, and background.
- Participants learned that appearance can be deceiving and appearance and personality are not the same. A small-size lady perceived herself as a tiger while a heavily-built male youth saw himself as having a gentle personality similar to a mouse. To avoid judging people based on their appearance is a key in relationship building.

- Also, they learned a thing/person or situation can be viewed rather differently by people. For example, some participants chose the same animal but stated different characteristics of the animal as best representing their personality. For example, a *Bhikhunee* (female monk) and a female Muslim youth chose a rabbit. The former cited that the gentleness and timidity of the rabbit represent her core personality while the latter said rabbits were known for their agility and she also shared that trait. Through this exchange the participants learned that individuals perceive things around them based on their life experiences and attach different values to them.

➤ *Positive story, positive energy*

Positive energy is crucial for dialogue. Amid deadly conflict like the one in the South of Thailand, people are daily bombarded with negativities. It is important for facilitators to draw from the group as much positive energy and thoughts as possible at the beginning of the process. In this interreligious dialogue positive energy can be drawn from asking participants to think of positive stories of people creating social bonds and meaningful relationship across ethno-religious boundaries.

The participants were divided into 13 small groups, each with 3 or 4 members. In this small group they were asked to share some positive stories in which people of different ethno-religious background engaging in meaningful relationship and weaving peaceful coexistence. The story should be the one they experience themselves or heard from their peers or people from their own communities.

Outcomes:

- One of the most interesting stories came from a youth in Yala who lost his father in a violent attack 7 years ago. He related that last year he and a group of Muslim friends had a chance to learn about Buddhist way of life with monks at a temple. Coming from a 100% Muslim community, this was a new and challenging experience for him as he had never intensely interacted with the Buddhists. During the time he spent interacting with monks he had learnt that his prior understanding and perception on Buddhism and Buddhists were often distorted and filled with prejudices. The experience helps him to see people of different ethno-religious group with new light and not to judge people based on their ethnicity and religious beliefs.
- According to the shared stories by participants we learned that the older generations tend to retain the strong bond they had with people of different ethno-religious groups prior to the outbreak of violence in 2004. Younger generations had fewer chances in cultivating relationship and engaging in social interaction with people of

different groups because of the separate education system (the Buddhist children and youths usually attend state-run schools while their Melayu counterpart prefer going to Islamic religious schools/institutions). Youth experiences with people of different groups usually come during the time they attend university. However, there were some youths, especially the Buddhist ones, who could relate pleasant memories they had with their Muslim friends living in the same village.

- A youth who has been acting as a leader of an active youth group promoting peace in the South expressed that he learned that nowadays youths of both Thai-Buddhist and Melayu-Muslim groups tend to view the opposite group with skepticism. The lack of direct social interaction between groups led to misperception and the unwillingness to trust and engage. It is crucial for the state and civil society to create social space for youths to interact now. Failure to promote unity among youths in the South is likely to lead to the collapse of the once-vibrantly and authentically multicultural society of three southernmost provinces.

➤ *Conflict-Actor-Actor's Relationship Analysis:*

When engaging groups into a dialogue it is also essential to make sure that the topics facilitators set as dialogue topics are well-understood by everyone in the group. Facilitators assessed the groups knowledge on the Unrest by asking them to engage in small group discussion: 2 groups for youths and 2 for women. Dr. Padtheera Nakurairattana, the lead facilitator of this session, asked participants to perform a casual conflict analysis focusing on 1) overall situation of the conflict as experienced by the people at the moment; 2) relationship between Buddhists and Muslims; 3) relationship between state authorities and the people. Reflecting on their perceptions on the conflict as a whole and on actors and stakeholders of the conflict and exchanging those views with their peers prepared them to focus their attention to listening and to learning from one another. It also helped facilitators learn about the ebb and flow of the conflict as experienced by the people in the area.

Outcomes:

- The whole conflicting situation in the South is perceived as 'getting better' for some and 'getting worse' by others. For those who saw that the situation is on its way to the peaceful resolution, about 1/3 of the participants mentioned that numbers of civilian victims has reduced sharply compared to the same period last year. This is to them a positive sign that the state and insurgent groups were at least on the same page. Another indicator of conflict being resolved was that the state has tried to communicate more with the people and this caused better

understanding between state and communities. Some participants, however, viewed that the Unrest had come to a stalemate state whereby all stakeholders got stuck and could neither step back or more forwards. There had been no improvement in months. While those who viewed conflict as getting worse pointed out that the failure of the state and insurgent groups engaged in peace dialogue to implement a safety zone in the South showed that they still could not see eyes to eyes and gain trust from each other.

- Relationship between Buddhists and Muslims seem to positively improved. There are a lot of civil society group where Buddhists and Muslims work together for peace in their communities and for equal opportunities and rights for all. Women in the South, in particular, are increasingly working together to make their voices as key victims and stakeholders of the conflict heard. Youth participants felt that some hateful messages or rumors spreading in social medias—for example, the systemic plan of the Muslims in Thailand to take over the country and push Thai-Buddhists out of three southernmost provinces—caused some strains in Buddhist-Muslim relations.
- The state agencies, representatives, and authorities still seem to be targets for criticism from both the Buddhists and Muslims living in and outside the area. Participants saw that the state had tried to become more pro-active in bridging gaps between itself and the people. Channels of communication were opened for the people to connect with authorities and, most often, used for clarifying miscommunication and misunderstanding regarding state's policies. However, people still felt that the authorities were not acting professionally and straightforwardly. They needed to show more sincerity when offering helps to the people and followed through on what they had earlier promised.

➤ *Double listening:*

When participants went through a small exercise on listening and exchanging, facilitators moved forwards with another deeper exercise on listening. *Double listening* is a technique in drawing hidden positive meanings, messages, and stories from a seemingly negative verbal communication. It sets on an assumption that when people say 'no' to something, they are actually saying 'yes' to another thing. When various groups of stakeholders of a conflict come to share their emotions, experiences, and views to one another, they tend not to catch the true needs of those on the other side. Anger and other emotions stand in the path of getting to the root cause of the problem. This technique helps them to think deeper and try to identify true needs and values upheld by others. Once the needs and values are well-understood, the people can move forwards with plans for the future.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gothom Arya gave an overview on Double Listening technique and let participants engaged in simple exercise in order to test their understanding. He gave the group some sentences retrieved from real life situations in the three southernmost provinces. One of the sentences was from a mouth of a high-ranking state authority: *'the claims by the Buddhists in the South of being sidelined or treated unfairly by the authorities are based on pure feeling. There is no factual proof of such claims.'* Another sentence is rather commonly heard in the South when a Melayu-Muslim person tries to explain to his/her Buddhist friend about the relationship between insurgent groups and the Melayu population: *'Do understand that those who resort to violent means for Merdeka (Independence) of Patani state are a very small minority group of the whole Melayu population'*. The participants worked in small groups in extracting positive meanings from these two and some other sentences.

Outcomes:

- It was rather difficult at first for participants to capture the idea of double listening. Some participants expressed that it was hard to abstain oneself from reacting emotionally once one heard some negative lines. 'It would take a while for me to calm down and to be ready to see the lines with new light', said a Buddhist lady in her 40s. A female Buddhist youth similarly noted and added that the task was even harder when you heard those lines from those you know too well to be negative persons. The facilitator then explained that double listening skill, like all listening skills, needed practices. The key to success is to allow yourself some time to explore hidden and alternative meanings and pinpoint the speaker's needs and values attached to those sentences.
- Some participants—a female monk and a Muslim lady in her 50s—similarly viewed that double listening was somehow related to both Buddhist and Islamic teachings. The concept of mindfulness in Buddhist teaching could be applied to double listening; if one is trained to be mindful and carefully process messages delivered by others, one will benefit quite a lot even in a negative situation. Islam preaches about seeing virtue in our fellow human beings. If one embraces this value, it would not be so hard to see that in negative messages lie some constructive comments that could be used for the improvement of oneself and of groups.

➤ *SWOT analysis:*

SWOT analysis is a form of analysis used for assessing performance and situations of an organization, institution, or group of people engaging in a task. Its key areas of assessments are both from within the group (factors the group can control/improve/change) and from outside the group (factors that are beyond the control of the group). They are 4 areas namely strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat. Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit gave a short slide presentation on key principles of SWOT analysis and some examples.

Facilitators then divided participants into 4 groups: 2 youth groups and 2 women groups. Each group were asked to discuss and answer these following questions:

- What are the strengths of your group (youth/women)?
- What are the weaknesses of your group (youth/women)?
- What can be opportunities for your group (youth/women)?
- What pose as challenges or threats for your group (youth/women)?

Outcomes:

- Two groups of women viewed that the *strengths* of women group/network/organization engaging in development and peace-building work lied in the nature/characteristics of women themselves. Women tend to adopt a holistic approach and, by nature of mother, carry out tasks with full responsibilities. For *weaknesses*, women tend to react quite emotionally to situations and still need to further boost their confidence and skills in order to perform better. There are a lot of *opportunities* for women to work as agents for change and conflict transformers in the South. For example, now that international and national policies are for the empowerment of women in political participation, peace building and conflict transformation, women in the South are regarded as potentially fund-receivers from various national and international agencies.
- For *challenges and threats*, the women viewed that some sections of Thai society still bear some prejudices against women. In the three southernmost provinces, women group still need to build bridges, expand their network and co-operations, and create more credibility in order to gain acceptance as reputable members of the civil society. Besides, in the area of civil society there are a lot of non-gender-based organizations that are regarded as potential fund-receivers by national and international agencies. These organizations are strong competitors for funding with women groups.

- Two groups of youths perceived the group's *strengths* as follows: compared to adults, youths are more open to new ideas and quite flexible. They are also technology-savvy and can use information from online sources to inspire themselves and come up with creative activities and plans. The *weaknesses* of youth groups are that youths have fewer life experiences and lower level of patience compared to adults. These result in the failure in making holistic decisions and plans. For *opportunities*, similar to opportunities for women groups, youths are getting supports from both national and international agencies. There are a lot of channels for youth groups to gain financial and other types of supports from these agencies. Regarding *challenges and threats*, the youths viewed that recognition of the group is still quite lower in the eyes of national and international agencies.
- Both women and youths felt that in order to successfully perform as agents for change and conflict transformer and generate strong impacts on peace-building in the South, gaining recognition and cooperation from the state, the army, and authorities is quite crucial. Women and youth groups need helps from other third-party organizations in cementing their relationship with state agencies.

Activities of 24 August





August 25th

➤ *Enhancing knowledge on peace process*

This session is the capacity building session for the participants. As participants have different level of knowledge on peace process, delegates from both Thai state and MARA Patani, and the appointed Malaysian facilitator. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gothom Arya gave an overall presentation on peace process and led the exchange on this topic.

The 1st peace dialogue for Southern peace was in the period of Yingluck Shinawatra's government back in 2012. It was between the National Security Council of Thailand (NSC), Party A, and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), Party B. The first peace dialogue did not create any impact in terms of peace-building. Nevertheless, it was the first occasion that the public got to know BRN leaders and their ideologies for the first time.

The 2nd peace dialogue is between Thai state and MARA Patani, the umbrella organization consisting not only BRN but also other 5 active insurgent groups in the South. The dialogue started in December 2014 and is still on-going. In this round of dialogue, the two parties agreed to work together on various areas. One of the areas is to create safety zones in the South. This safety zone project, if successfully implemented, will be the first step towards a longer peace building plan. Malaysia still acts as facilitator of the Southern Thailand's dialogue and Tan Sri Rahim Noor, a former police chief of Malaysia, is appointed as the leading figure in the facilitator team. Thai Prime Minister and the Malaysian facilitator agreed to meet in November 2018 to discuss the direction of the peace-building process.

Outcomes:

- The 2nd Peace dialogue is a topic that both women and youths are keen to discuss. Both women and youths felt that peace delegates from both conflicting parties should listen to the people of the south more. Both parties, including Malaysia—the facilitator—should create more channels for the people to send in their opinion on how peacebuilding plan should be developed. The interests and needs of the people are as important as those of the authorities and MaraPatani. Transparency was also a common issue of concern for both youth and women. They stressed that it was crucial for both parties to not ‘doing things behind close doors’; the citizens should be kept posted on the progress and direction of the dialogue. *‘Each party should show that it is willing to engage in the process and really want this dialogue to work. Otherwise, this talk will be a flop, just like the previous one.’* said a Muslim youth from Fatoni University.
- Some participants expressed that they did not expect much from this peace dialogue. It seems that both Thai state and MaraPatani still cannot see eye to eye and are not on the same page. It is important for them to trust each other and

➤ *Brainstorming for future activities and issues to propose to members of Interreligious Council of Thailand:*

Participants were divided into two big groups: the women and the youth. Separately they engaged in Open Space and World Café dialogues. In the Open Space dialogue participants were asked to brainstorm for issues that are crucial for social developments and peacebuilding in the south. Facilitators asked *‘in your opinion, what are issues suitable for youths/women to work on in the southern Thailand context?’* The participants wrote 1 suitable issue on a piece of paper. A piece of paper could only contain 1 idea/issue. From the issues collected from Open Space dialogue facilitators classified issues into 3-4 themes and engaged participants in World Café dialogue to further develop a concrete future plan. In this session participants were asked 3 questions and had 30 minutes to discuss each question in small groups. The 3 questions are as follows:
1) what will be a concrete but short term project that the Youths of Faith for Peace can carry out?; 2) what will be obstacles for those activities?; 3) how do we and our network can support this project?

Outcomes:

- Women group proposed a lot of ideas during the Open Space dialogue. The facilitators grouped them into 3 themes: 1) *promoting Buddhist-Muslim relation*; 2) *capacity building for women in the south*; 3) *strengthening bond within family*. In World Café dialogue the group came up with three projects: 1) **Family and Interreligious Bond project** which is aimed to strengthen bond between parents and their children and engage them in religious practices. Through this strong family bond and firm religious beliefs, youth will be guided to the right path and become responsible members of communities and country; 2) **Supporting Single Mother project**, this project is to tackle the common issue shared by both Buddhist and Muslim communities regarding the increase in number of single mothers in the area; 3) **Peaceful Community project**, which is aimed to build bridges between communities through engaging Buddhists and Muslims in social development activities.

The women felt hopeful that they and members of their networks could cooperate and work to achieve goals of the projects. The challenges/obstacles they may face are related to time-management of the team members and situations in the South. For example, if there are high number of violent incidents when the project is being carried out, number of people of the target groups participating in the activities of the project may be low. This is because the people are scared for leaving their houses.

- Youths were interested in various issues. For example, drug abuse among youths of the south, cultural and religious literacy among youths, capacity building for youths on IT and global trends, historical knowledge and debate. Facilitators classified these issues into 4 themes: 1) *Interreligious cooperation and relations*; 2) *social issue for development*; 3) *capacity building for youths*; 4) *and peace-building*. In World Café dialogue they managed to come up with a concrete project for each theme. Those projects are as follows: 1) **History Talk project** which aimed to engage people, especially youths, in the South in discussion and debate on Siam-Patani history; 2) **Building interreligious bond project** which aimed to create a platform for youths of different religions in the learning of cultural and religious beliefs and practices of communities in the South; 3) **No More Troubled Youths project** which was designed to tackle issues faced by youths namely drug abuse, motorcycle racing, teen pregnancy and etc and 4) **Outdoor Classroom project** which aimed to equip and enhance youths of the south with knowledge and skills necessary for modern living.
- Issues to propose to Interreligious Council of Thailand from the women and youth groups are as follows:

1. Encourage religious leaders in its network to 1) work together for peaceful coexistence in the South; 2) preach more the concept of tolerance and respect for those who bear differences from oneself; 3) help religious followers to be more active in the conflict transformation of the south; 4)
2. Promote and support interreligious cooperation among women and youths both in the three southernmost provinces and outside;
3. Support more activities that promote youth and women participation in decision making process or policy drafting;
4. If possible, develop mechanism in protecting vulnerable groups from violence;

Activities of 25 August



August 26th

- Samoan Dialogue on *“how can women and youths work together to tackle family problems?”*

Two representatives from each group of participants were seated in front of the rest of the participants who sat in circle. Each of them took turn proposing ideas and suggestions from his/her group members. These ideas and suggestions on the set question came from each and every one of the groups; they wrote their ideas down in a piece of paper and passed it to the representatives. Each representative had 5 minutes to present those ideas.

Outcomes:

- Youths suggested that women and youths can cooperate and come up with projects to tackle the issue. Some projects should be designed to help both youths and women get to understand the root causes of a set of family problems while the other projects should focus on translating those understanding into concrete measures or activities. Youths viewed that it is crucial to raise awareness among youths that they have potentials to solve the problems. Empowering youths to be able to work alongside women is very important step.
 - Representatives from women group expressed that one of the most serious family problems found in three southernmost provinces and in Thailand is domestic violence in which both women and youths are victims. In order to directly prevent domestic violence, both women and youth must set family values of respect and appreciation. Each person within a family has his/her own role towards the family bond and unity. It is important to stress the roles and duties of each family members. The projects suitable to restore awareness on roles and duties of family members are ones that provide space of youth to exchange with youth and women with women. With their peers sending these messages, youths and women are likely to cooperate instead of going against them.
- Samoan Dialogue on *“how can religious followers join hands in promoting peace in the South?”*

Similar to the previous session, this Samoan dialogue featured ideas and suggestions from four participants, two from women and another two from youths. Other participants can join the discussion by leaving their seats and coming to occupy two empty seats next to the selected representatives.

Outcomes:

- Both youths and women viewed that first thing to do in order to build peace in the South is to reduce prejudice one has towards people from different religious groups. How to such reduce prejudices? Prejudices come from misunderstanding. The best way to promote understanding is to increase social interaction between groups. In recent years social spaces where by people of different groups, especially youths, can come and interact are not as abundant as before. It is important for the state and civil society to create these spaces promoting inter-group social interaction and cooperation.
- Another idea is to look within their own religious beliefs and principles and embrace the concepts of love, compassion, respect, and mercy, which can be found in all religious teachings.

➤ *Exchange with members of RfP-IRC Thailand and wrap-up*

Two groups of participants later presented the projects—3 from the women and 4 from youths—they drafted from Open Space and World Café dialogues the day before to members of RfP-IRC Thailand. There were 10 members of the council present at the event. Most of them agreed that the projects and ideas proposed by both groups were interesting and should be brought into concrete plan next year. They called these projects “*local initiatives*” which were regarded as adopting much more holistic approach to peacebuilding for the South.



Some council members would like to create a youth network beyond three southernmost provinces. Youths from the South should be exposed to ideas outside the South and make friends across regions. As many of the council members work with youths and women, they are willing to connect members of Women and Youths of Faith for Peace, Religions for Peace Thailand, with youths and women in their own networks. It seems that next year we can expect greater cooperation and collaboration between our council members

and two of our established women and youth group.



5. Overall outcomes of the 3-day dialogue

- The Women of Faith for Peace and Youth of Faith for Peace reflected on their own and the overall women and youth of the south's current situations as well as understand their own and the other's perspective on experiences.
- The Women of Faith for Peace and Youth of Faith for Peace gained certain useful knowledge for the enhancement of their and the group's capacities. With these enhanced capacities they should be able to participate as agents for change in finding more rigorous and effective solutions for conflict transformation in the southern border provinces.
- The Women of Faith for Peace and Youth of Faith for Peace came to learn and share experiences with each other as well as work together to solve the conflict in the southern border provinces

B. Interreligious Council of Thailand Annual Meeting

There were altogether 14 members of Interreligious Council of Thailand attending the *RfP*-IRC Annual Meeting 2018 in the afternoon of August 26th. There were four observers who were from Women and Youths of Faith for Peace and Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (SBPAC). Two Co-Presidents of the Council—Venerable Phra Sirijariyalangkan (Charat Uchucharo), the Chief Monk of Pattani and abbot of Wat Taneenasamosorn, and Associate Professor Dr. Lutfi Japakiya, Rector of Fatoni University—kindly gave opening remarks for the meeting.

➤ Opening: Discussion on the current situation in the South of Thailand

Members of the council shared their views on the current situations in the South. Most of them expressed that the situation seemed to get better compared to last year. One of the key indicators is that there have been fewer violent incidents affecting vulnerable groups. Both conflicting parties with arm troops tend to target each other instead of targeting vulnerable groups. Some members expressed worries as the peace process between Thai state and MaraPatani seemed to have no progress; both parties still could not work together and mutual trust and respect is not present.



A member of the council raised the Hijab issue at Pattani Kindergarten School, Mueng district, Pattani as one of the incidents creating another cleavage between Buddhist and Muslim communities in the three southernmost provinces. The issue came to view in May 2017 when four new female Muslim students of the school decided to wear hijab to school. Wearing hijab to this school is against the 50-year-old rule of the school which strictly upholds a principle that none of its students should

wear any religious marker. This issue escalates when actors from outside the three southernmost provinces try to intervene with the problem solving process. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gothom Arya briefly informed the council about the dialogue organized by IHRP, Mahidol to tackle this issue. IHRP led by Dr. Gothom managed to get both Buddhist and Muslim parents to talk and seek mutual understanding and perception of the issue. However, it seemed that both sides still refused to compromise and thought that they were doing the right thing. This issue is definitely needed more time to tackle as it is a very sensitive issue. Most Muslim committees of the council expressed that based on rights to culture principle Muslims girls should be able to wear hijab to school and there should be no circumstance whereby they are banned from expressing themselves as Muslims.

➤ Agenda 1: Report on 2018 activities and financial figure

Activity Report:

Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, the secretary of the council, informed the committee about activities organized in July and August this year, namely

1. **RfP and Unicef “Faith for Social and Behavior Change Workshop”** whereby more than 75 Unicef staffs and religious leaders from 6 continents attending the event to enhance the cooperation between civil society and religious organization for the promotion of maternal and child health.



2. **Interreligious Dialogue on Women and Youths of Faith for Peace, RfP-IRC Thailand, August 24th-26th, 2018** at the C.S. Pattani Hotel, Pattani, Thailand (see session A, page 2 to 18)
3. **Online visibility enhancing activities: Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council Facebook page and www.thairfpirc.com**

Financial report:

After organizing activities in 2017 RfP Thailand had 7550 Baht left in its account. At the middle of 2017 RfP Thailand received another 330,000 Baht from Religions for Peace International, New York. This amount of 330000 Baht was spent on this 2018 Interreligious Council Annual Meeting, 6-month salary for RfP Coordinator Ms. Kanyanat Valajang, and costs in managing RfP Thailand’s Secretariat Office (Room 105, Panyaphiphat Building, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University). The cost in organizing the 3-day Interreligious Dialogue on Women and Youths of Faith

for Peace, RfP-IRC Thailand, 291000 Baht, is fully supported by IHRP, Mahidol. Before the end of 2018 RfP Thailand will update its balance sheet and report the remaining amount in 2018 report of activity to be submitted to RfP International in December 2018.

➤ Agenda 2: Endorsement of the 2017 minutes of meeting

Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, the secretary of the council, asked the committee to read the 2017 minutes of meeting hand-out and checked whether it has all the points proposed by the committees in the previous meeting back in September 2017. After informing IHRP team about a few spelling mistakes spotted in the document, the committee endorsed it.

➤ Agenda 3: Issue to consider

3.1 Updating name list of committees of the council

In the 2017 annual meeting there were some new names proposed to be committee of the council, replacing those who are not free to perform duties of council members or no longer in the leading position of their religious organization. For example, Phra Phrama Bundit who used to act as the rector of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University (MCU) is now retired from the position. The council needs to approach the new MCU rector to replace him. The council also considered dropping some names from the list of council committee. For example, if a person has been listed as council committee for about 5 years yet he/she has never attended the council annual meeting, the council will consider dropping this person from the committee list. It is also important to add more Buddhist religious leaders in the council as the majority of the council committee are Muslims.

New names proposed to be member of council were as follows:

1. Phra Maha Bunchoy Doojai, former deputy rector of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, and now the head of administrative office MCU, Chiangmai Campus
2. Phra Maha Suchat Maion, from Wat Changhai and Mahachulalongkorn University, Pattani Campus
3. Dr. Kanthong Wattanapradit, a lecturer from Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Wangnoi-Ayutthaya Campus
4. Asnawi Mukura, a member of Islamic Committee for 15 southern provinces,
5. Assist. Prof. Dr. Suchat Setthamaline, from Payap University (proposed in 2017 meeting)

The council committee still can propose names within 2 weeks after the meeting. Dr. Suphatmet will approach them to ask whether they would like to act as IRC committee.

➤ Agenda 4: Setting standard practices for IRC statement and victims of violent incidents

Since its establishment in 2009 the council has never set rules or regulations on how to arrange a solidarity visit to victims of violent incidents in the South and to release of statement condemning violent acts. Regarding the solidarity visit, the committee viewed that the council members living in the area should be the ones who perform the visit. They should bring with them condolence note from the council and some useful items for the victims. Regarding the statement, most council members agreed that issuing a statement under the council name was far better than issuing it with individual names. However, they all agreed that coming up with the appropriate content for statement was not easy. Most important thing to bear in mind when drafting the statement is how to incorporate religious principles in a text that is not written just to condemn those who committed violent acts but to raise awareness among community members that violent means is not a solution for conflict.

➤ Agenda 5: Activity Plan for 2019

1. *Dialogues, fieldtrips and workshops:*

For 2019 the committee agreed to organize activities or capacity building workshop that 1) enhance its religious leader network and promote religious leaders' roles in peacebuilding, 2) promote and support the Women of Faith for Peace and Youths of Faith for Peace. After listening to the representatives of both Women of Faith for Peace and Youths of Faith for Peace proposing project proposals, the council committee became very eager to engage more in those projects. They thought it would be possible this time to expand networks of religious leaders, women, and youths beyond three southernmost provinces. *RfP* Thailand executive team had already drafted a proposal for interreligious dialogue and fieldtrip targeting religious leaders regardless of age, sex, and living localities. The activities will be organized not only in the southern region but also in the north, northeast, and central region. It will also propose some further ideas via LINE group and the committee will give comments before the drafting of 2019 proposal in Jan 2019.

2. Other activities:

Lect. Kriya Langputeh from Fatoni University proposed the idea of producing a 5 religions guidebook and manual for training youths about religious principles promoting peaceful coexistence. The content of this guidebook and manual will be drafted by members of IRC. Most committee members agreed with this plan and viewed it as a great way to promote roles of council members in the work of *RfP* Thailand.

3. 2019 *RfP*-IRC Thailand Annual Meeting:

The council decided that in 2019 *RfP*-IRC Thailand Annual meeting will take place some time at the end of the year, after all the activities end. This is for the better reflection and discussion on the achievement of *RfP*-IRC Thailand and planning for 2020, bearing in mind all the challenges in building peace in Thai, Southeast Asian, and international contexts and trends.

C. Conclusion and Plan for 2019

In 2018 the most crucial achievement of *RfP* Thailand is its ability to establish Youths of Faith for Peace network and let the group work with the Women of Faith for Peace. Dialogue process proved to be suitable for two groups to engage actively and constructively with one another and to learn from one another's experience. With its own strong southern religious leader network, 2019 will be a crucial period whereby *RfP* Thailand could advance for cooperation and collaboration between religious leaders and the other two groups, namely the women and youths. Learning and sharing among the three groups will definitely create better understanding of the conflict at personal level and may affect relationship at interpersonal and communal levels as well.

In 2019 *RfP* Thailand plans to organize capacity building workshop, fieldtrips and dialogues among religious and community leaders in other parts of the country namely north and northeastern regions, apart from dialogues among religious leaders at the central and southern regions. When southern religious leader network is already well-established and maintained, it is time to expand the network to enclose religious leaders in other parts of the country. North and northeastern regions exhibit religious and ethnic diversity and harmony. It is, then, necessary to extract best practice on peaceful coexistence from the people living in the regions and share it with people from the South. The interaction and exchange between religious leaders from various parts of the country will be the key characteristics of 2019 *RfP* Thailand's activity plan.

D. Financial Report of 2018

August- December 2018					
	Total (THB)	Total (US)	Project Name	Total (THB)	Total (US)
Balance 2018	7,232.23	221.78			
Money Management/ Director project management fee 2018	387,532.59	11,883.86	Coordinator salary : August- December 2018 (monthx THB: 5 x 18,000)	90,000.00	2,759.89
			IRC committees Hddat Pattani fee 2018	50,639.76	1,552.89
			Estimated Budget for the planning of UNICEF- RFP workshop (July 9- 12, 2018)	77,673.11	2,381.88
			The translation	3,000.00	92.00
			Account auditing fee 2018	2,500.00	76.66
			Project Management fee 2018	20,000.00	613.31
	394,764.82	12,105.64		243,812.87	7,476.63
Balance 150,951.95 THB/ 32.61 USD= 4,629.01 USD					
			balance	150,951.95	4,629.01