



Narrative and Financial Report of 2019

(January – December 2019)

Under the theme

'Religious Communities and the Promotion and Consolidation of a True Sense of Multiculturalism in Thai Society'.

Ву

Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand (*RfP*-IRC Thailand)

Secretariat office: Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University



Report of Activities 2019

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 Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies Mahidol University

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.

Due to the limited budget in 2019 only two key activities—two interreligious dialogues with fieldtrips—were carried out by RfP Thailand to accommodate the theme 'Religious Communities and the Promotion and Consolidation of a True Sense of Multiculturalism in Thai Society'. They were supported financially from the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University. They were conducted in two big multi-ethnic and religious cities of Thailand: Surin in the north-eastern region and Chiangmai in the north region. Their primary goal is to further enhance the idea of multiculturalism among Thais and engage religious and community leaders in the construction of a genuine multicultural society whereby mutual respect, trust and understanding of differences among the people of diverse ethno-religious background are at its basis. In both cities we engaged about 25 religious/ethnic community leaders in 3-day activity comprised of 2-day indoor discussion using dialogue methods and a day fieldtrip to 3-4 communities with strong interreligious/ethnic cooperation and coexistence. Combing dialogue with fieldtrip is a great way both to extract both the perception and experience of the participants on multiculturalism and to engage them with local communities. As fieldtrip was inserted in between 2-day dialogue, on the last day the participants discussed lesson-learned from the field visit and planned together for future concrete projects that could tackle present and in-coming challenges.

It is learnt from the two dialogues that in the opinion of religious and community leaders there are a lot to be done in the northeastern and northern regions of Thailand for the successful construction of a multicultural society. For example, 1) interreligious/interethnic education needs to be enhanced with proper curriculum and well-trained instructors, 2) prejudice against ethnic/religious minority groups needs to be eliminated via various forms of meaningful interethnic/religious interaction and the rewritten of Thai history to include more features on ethnic/religious minority groups, their struggles and contribution towards Thailand's prosperity and development. They have come up with interesting project proposals to tackle issues they viewed as crucial and need immediate attention. In both of our dialogues, facilitators introduced the dialogue process stressing dialogue essence which are deep-listening, abstaining from judgement before listening carefully and respecting one another. Our RfP Thailand facilitators also tried to engage participants in various form of popularly used dialogue namely Open Space Dialogue, World Café Dialogue, and Circle Dialogue. In group discussions, participants were also given guidelines on how to constructively engage in the discussion and listen to opposite opinions. Most participants expressed via questionnaire distributed at the end of dialogue that they have learn a lot about dialogue process and wish to join *RfP* Thailands future activities.



1. Summary of overall activities carried out in 2019 and their source of financial support

No.	Activity	Ad-hoc or in the initial proposal plan	Date/month/venue	participants	Expenses
		I. Ac	tivity supported <i>RfP</i> Inter	national	
1.	Visit by ACRP representatives	Ad-hoc	January 18 th Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies	9 representatives from ACRP led by Rev. Nemoto	235.54 USD (7,243 Baht) Paid from the money left in <i>RfP</i> Thailand account
2.	Meeting with local religious/ethnic leaders to plan for the activity as well as visiting possible venues for dialogue and fieldtrip	Ad-hoc	March Srikorrabhumi sand castle and temple, Surin	3 <i>RfP</i> Thailand team with 10 leaders of Surin	498.84 USD (15,339.40 Baht) Paid from the money left in <i>RfP</i> Thailand account
3.	Thailand's Consultation Meeting for Lindau World Assembly ¹	Ad-hoc	April 25 th The C.S Pattani Hotel	Members of IRC Thailand, Women and Youths of Faith for Peace <i>RfP</i> -IRC Thailand	2,000 EUR 70,000 Baht Supported by <i>RfP</i> International
			te of Human Rights and Po		
4.	Expert Seminar (SEAAIR Project) ²	In the proposal 2019 of <i>RfP</i> International	July IHRP, MU	15 experts on the issues of FoRB and Interreligious dialogue	SEAAIR Budget (EU funding)
5.	3-day Dialogue and fieldtrip in Surin	In the proposal 2019	August 1 st -3 rd Thongtharin Hotel and local communities in Srikorrabhumi district	31 participants from various religious and ethnic communities from provinces in the northeastern region	4692.29 USD (144,288.01 Baht) Paid by IHRP, Mahidol University
5.	Meeting with local religious/ethnic leaders to plan for the activity as well as visiting possible venues for dialogue and fieldtrip	Ad-hoc	August Chiangmai town area	2 <i>RfP</i> Thailand team with 10 leaders of Chiangmai	7000 Baht paid by IHRP, MU
6.	3-day dialogue and fieldtrip in Chiangmai	In the proposal 2019	August 15 th -17 th Wind Tree Hotel, Chiangmai and local communities in Chiangmai town and Chiangdow district	33 participants from various religious and ethnic communities from Chiangmai	4909.24 USD (150,952.12 Baht) Paid by IHRP, MU

¹ Its full report was submitted to *RfP* International in June 2019

² Its full report was shared among the project's partners at the end of 2019



2. Brief report of visit by ACRP representatives, 18th January 2019

On 18 January 2019 from 9.30-11.30 am the representatives of Asia Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) led my Rev. Nobuhiro Nemoto visited Religions for Peace Thailand's secretariat office at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP), Mahidol University at Salaya, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. Apart from Rev. Nemoto, the group consisted of Rev. Masamichi Kamiya, Prof. Desmond Cahil (Religions for Peace Australia), Dr. Deepali Bhanot (Religions for Peace India), Prof. Dr. Pablito Baybado (Religions for Peace Philippines), Mr. Tatsuya Yoshida (Religions for Peace Japan), Ms. Kanchana Soonsawad (Thailand National Chapter ACRP). The group was welcomed by Dr. Eakpant Pindavanija, IHRP Director, Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit (Secretary-General, RfP Thailand), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gothom Arya (Advior, RfP Thailand) and Ms. Kanyanat Valajang (RfP Thailand coordinator).



ACRP Visit to RfP Thailand and Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University

RfP Thailand and ACRP exchanged on these following issues: current works of *RfP* Thailand and the impact of the work in the area of conflict transformation in the deep south of Thailand, structure of *RfP* Thailand and how the council and committee members operates, ways to enhance stronger cooperation and collaboration between *RfP* Thailand and ACRP in the future. It was



agreed that *RfP* Thailand representatives will be joining ACRP future activities and meetings. The upcoming meeting was the Executive Committee Meeting of ACRP set in Osaka in April, 2020. Dr. Yunyasit will be joining the meeting for the first time and learn more about ACRP and its members.

After the discussion *RfP* Thailand arranged a sightseeing trip around Mahidol Salaya campus for half and hour and the group had lunched at a restaurant within the campus. At 13.30 ACRP team left for another engagement in BKK town. Mahidol University reported on this visit via its news channel and the link is pasted here: <u>https://mahidol.ac.th/th/2019/ihrp-rfp-asia/</u>

3. Brief report of meeting of local ethnic and religious leaders at Surin as a preparation meeting for the coming dialogue in Surin, 2nd April 2019

RfP Thailand planned to organize two dialogues—one in Surin and the other in Chiangmai—this year.³ RfP staff has never before worked with local communities in Surin before. They then decided that it is essential to travel to Surin to discuss the organization of the dialogue with prospective participants who are also the local ethnic-religious community leaders. A day trip was organized for 3 *RfP* Thailand staff: Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit (SG, *RfP* Thailand), Dr. Padtheera NakUrairatana (Deputy SG, *RfP* Thailand) and Ms. Kanyanat Valajang (Coordinator, *RfP* Thailand).

In the morning from 9.30-12.30 am. *RfP* Team met with 13 ethnic and religious leaders, representatives of civil society as well as government officials of Surin at a small coffee shop located in front of Surin-Sri Korabhumi's landmark '*the Sri Korabhumi Sand Castle*'. This castle was constructed during the time immemorial where Khmer kingdom was at its zenith and ruled the now present day northeastern region of Thailand. These key actors joining the meeting are of 4 main ethnic groups of Surin (Thai, Khmer, Laotian, Kui) and of two religious affiliations (Buddhism and Islam). The topics of discussion were as follows:

- Overview on ethnic and religious communities of Srikorabhumi and Surin (their origin, background and distinctiveness)
- How these ethnic and religious communities interact (what types of activities they jointly participate and in which manner those activities are carried out)
- Actors or groups of actor working on ethnic-religious identity consolidation and maintenance
- Support and initiatives by the state in the maintenance of ethnic identity of the people
- Obstacles faced by actors in creating social harmony, acceptance and peaceful coexistence in Surin
- Key actors that should be invited to join 3-day dialogue on multiculturalism

³ Initially in the 2019 proposal four dialogues were planned. But due to the budget cut, only two dialogues were carried out and with the budget from Mahidol University.





The information gained from this 3 hours informal meeting was used for the preparation of Surin dialogue. In the afternoon *RfP* team had an opportunity to go around Sri Korabhumi area with one of the local actor, visiting some key sites they had in mind for a filed-trip day which will be a part of the dialogue. They took note on distance and time spent on travelling from one place to another place. After the meeting *RfP* team kept in touch with those local actors via LINE application and phone calls. They sought help and consulted with these leaders on dialogue agenda, fiedtrip, and other activities until the day of the dialogue $(1^{st}-3^{rd}$ August 2020)

4. Narrative report of two dialogues under the 2019 theme '*Religious Communities and the Promotion* and Consolidation of a True Sense of Multiculturalism in Thai Society'

4.1 Background and rationale

In 2019 the activities to be carried out by *RfP* Thailand (its secretariat office located at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University) with strong cooperation with its Interreligious Council (IRC) will be designed to accommodate the theme '*Religious Communities and the Promotion and Consolidation of a True Sense of Multiculturalism in Thai Society*'. The goal of the project is to further enhance the idea of multiculturalism among Thais and engage religious leaders and communities in the



construction of a genuine multicultural society whereby mutual respect, trust and understanding of differences among the people of diverse ethno-religious background are at its basis.

The concept of multiculturalism comes from the Western society, especially the ones where people of various ethnic groups have immigrated and lived with the local citizens. The United States, Canada and Australia are where the concept of multiculturalism has thrived and bloomed until it has been known as 'models of a multicultural society'. As for the eastern society like the Thai society which strongly adheres to *ethnic nationalism*, the notion of multiculturalism has been somewhat known and mentioned in the academic circle as well as driving the society for the past 20 years. Nevertheless, it has neither been taken seriously as norms nor widely practiced across the country despite the fact that Thailand is a home to more than 70 various ethnic groups with different religious and cultural identities.

According to the study of multicultural societies in many countries, it is learned that the state agency is a main mechanism to push forward the multicultural society. In Canada and Australia, the governments have implemented the policy of multiculturalism which includes establishing an agency systematically building the multicultural society. Moreover, they have supported universities to do research about each ethnic groups' perceptions towards the concept of multiculturalism and what could be a suitable model suitable to their social, economic and political context. For Thailand, merely expecting the government to build a multicultural society is not an effective mean because the Thai state has held on the concept of monoculturalism and believed that the multiculturalism is a threat to the national security. Therefore, the initiatives from various societal sectors which can push on the idea of cultural diversities and cultural right of those living in Thailand could be considered as a more effective approach for concrete and sustainable result than only relying on the government.

Following the several interreligious dialogues for Peace in the past 5 years organized by Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University with supports from many international organizations, it becomes clear that the different religious groups namely Buddhism which is majority of the country, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism or Sikhism have power and ability to create positive changes in the society. Regarding the conflict in the Thailand's Southern Border Provinces, the religious groups are the main stakeholders and have often contributed interesting suggestions to the dialogues for peace. Therefore, the religious groups could be potential forces to build a multicultural society across ethnic divides. Their collaborations in support of the multicultural society could trigger momentum into the society as well as to implement the concept into practice in the general public.

4.2 Objectives:

- To understand the concept of multiculturalism for positive peace from perspectives of religious leaders from different regions of Thailand namely North, Northeastern, Southern (focusing on Southern Border Provinces), and Central regions.
- To provide a platform for religious and community leaders to exchange their perspectives and opinions on the concept of multiculturalism as well as to draft a structure of the multicultural society and policy of multiculturalism that are substantial and suitable for the Thai society and to pass on the policy proposal to the relevant state sectors
- > To build relationship, understanding and collaboration among the religious leaders which will lead to a realization of the structure and policy of multiculturalism in the Thai society.
- To promote dialogue culture and make it widely known among religious leaders in the different regions of Thailand.



To promote mutual understanding regarding religious beliefs and practices between religious communities and religious followers in Thai society

4.3 Target groups and actual number of participants:

Initially we set main target groups of the dialogues at **60-70** religious and community leaders (both ordained and lay persons and of various age and gender) from Thailand's **3** major religions namely Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. These leaders are from 3 regions of Thailand namely North, Northeastern, South (primarily from three southernmost provinces), and Central regions. **However, due to the budget cut from** *RfP* **International we have to adjust the plan to be as follows**:

Total number of dialogues: two dialogues (each is organized for 3 days)

Targeted areas: two regions namely Northeastern and North region

<u>Number of participants</u>: altogether **64** religious and community leaders participated in the dialogues. They are classified into their religious affiliation as shown in the table below.

Dialogue	Religious affiliation				total
	Buddhist	Christian	Muslim	Sikh	Total
	(Buddhist	(male/female)	(male/female)	(male)	(male/female)
	monk/layperson)				
Surin	11/14	-	2/3	-	31 (22/8)
Chiangmai	8/10	7/4	1/2	1	33 (18/15)
total	43	11	8	1	64

For both dialogue female participants were outnumbered by their male counterpart. In Surin 8 female community leader attending in the event while in Chiangmai 15 female participants interacted with 18 male participants. In both dialogue Buddhist monks constituted the largest number of participants with 11 and 8 of them participating in Surin and Chiangmai dialogue respectively. Most Buddhist monks attending the event are in their 20s and early 30s. 5 Buddhist monks out of a total of 19 are senior monks and they are well-respected in the province. One of the monks, Phra Maha Boonchuy Doojai holds a position at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist Univerity, Chiangmai campus. He is a reputable scholar and peace activist. At Surin dialogue a former MP of Surin who is a Muslim lady participated in the dialogue. Two activist monks also actively participated in the event and hosted the group during the filed-trip at their monastery. These religious and community leaders will be selected to join the activity based on their experiences in promoting interreligious and intercultural understanding and cooperation.

4.4 Process:

Our **2** interreligious dialogues organized in Northeastern (Surin) **and in** the North (Chiangmai). These dialogues took 3 days. Details of activity for each day are as follows:

Day 1: On the first day we design sessions that would facilitate sharing and discussion among the participants on the concept of *Multiculturalism* and *current state of inter-ethnic/religious interaction in lower Isan region (Isan Tai)* for Surin and in the northern region for Chiangmai. A series of activities, namely a panel discussion, Open Space dialogue, Dot Democracy and World Café dialogue, were carried out on this day in order to learn about issues perceived by these religious and community leaders as obstacles for





the formation of a true multicultural society and what seem to be possible and tangible ways to tackle those issues.



Surin Dialogue



Chiangmai Dialogue

Day 2: fieldtrip to local communities for first-hand experience on their ethnic characteristics, interethnic/religious interaction and coexistence.

• *Surin Sites*: we selected altogether 7 strategic sites for this mission. All of these sites bear certain degree of importance to the characteristics of Surin as a province. They were as follows: Ngangkuaung Chinese school, Sri Korabhumi Castle and temple, Chinese Shrine of Sri Korabhumi,





Nurul Iman Masjid, Hua Rad community (Kui community), Aung Lam Pok community, evening market of Sri Korabhumi



Surin's field vist

• *Chiangmai sites:* we selected altogether 6 strategic sites for this mission. All of these sites bear certain degree of importance to the characteristics of Chiangmai as a province. They were as follows: Holy Family Catholic Church, Chiang Dow, Nong Khiew Community hall, Kachin local community of Chiang Dow, Princess Ubonratana School, Wat Ketkaram community area where 4 ethno-religious communities (Thai Buddhist, Thai-Chinese, Muslim and Sikh communities) coexist peacefully for a long time







Chiangmai's Field Visit

Day 3: Lesson learned and way forward

On this day participants were engaged in dialogue to draw best practice and lessons-learned from the fieldtrip and planned for future collaboration. Facilitators led them into series of dialogue namely Circle dialogue and World Café before asking them to reflect on their satisfaction of the dialogue process and what they have learned from the 3-day event as well as brainstorming on how to keep in touch with one another in the future.



4.5 Overall outcome and impact of two dialogues

Facilitator team had set the **4** expected outcome and qualitative and quantitative indictor prior to launching the 3-day dialogue in two area. The set outcome and actual outcome are as follows:

- Expected outcome and Qualitative and Quantitative indicators:
- 1) The participants acknowledge and understand various perspectives of multiculturalism from different religious fellows

Surin dialogue:

Most participants expressed that multiculturalism is socially-constructed concept. It is a state of society whereby its members enjoy equal rights and freedom to express their ethno-cultural identities. Multiculturalism is the basis for a peaceful society consisting of people of diverse ethnic and religious background. It seems that our participants did not have diverse views on the notion and manifestation of multiculturalism. Their different perspective of the term lied in the manner of how ethnic/religious identity and national identity should coexist: whether one should see oneself as a Thai national first or as a member of Khmer, Kui, Laotian, or Muslim first.

From 3-day activities it is clear that our participants viewed that relationship between majority and minority groups plays a crucial roles in the success or failure in the construction of a multicultural society in the country. Generally in Isan Tai region ethnic/religious communities still interact with one another in a positive and constructive manner. However, they agreed that true sense of multiculturalism has yet to manifest in Thailand due to the lack of systematic implementation by the state. In their interaction Thai citizens are engaged in a superior-inferior manner; ethnic Thai and Buddhist citizens, the majority group, seem to be regarded as the 'owner' of the country in the sense that the minority groups have to somehow conform to their practice and way of life and assimilate, in various degree and manners, into this predominantly Thai-Buddhist culture and society. Some participants—some lecturers, former local politicians, and those who have experience serving as civil servants—mentioned Thailand's nation building process taking place since the reign of King Rama V up until the 1950s as the key incident constructing 1) the lopsided majority-minority in Thai society, 2) ethnic Thai chauvinism, and 3) misrepresentation of ethnic minority groups that lead to prejudice and discrimination. Ethnic nationalism carried out through various state policies and practices as well as activities by other sectors of the society has directed ethnic/religious minority groups to adopt cultural behaviors of the Thais and behaviors deemed 'civilized' by the state. This caused the loss of their cultural practices, language in particular.

Although most participants agreed that nation-building process/ethnic nationalism led by the state served as crucial factor for Thailand's cultural and structural violence, there was a Buddhist monk from Surin who felt that to blame such past process for the present situation was somehow unrealistic; more often than not, he noted, it was our nature to have prejudice and to think ourselves as more superior than others of different groups. He stressed that we should pay attention to our own actions contributing to such phenomenon and intensifying it too.

Ethnic/religious minority groups in Isan Tai have tried to revive their cultural practices. Cultural revitalization projects are mostly carried out as initiatives by organizations established by ethnic minority groups. For example, Kui group in Surin has its Kui organization established for more than 10 years. This organization collected information on Kui population in Surin and their living localities. It also traced history of Kui group and how Kui identify themselves and assert their ethnic identity. Joined actions by ethnic



minority groups in the cultural revitalization also take place in Surin and other Isan Tai provinces. There are campaigns encouraging government officials to dress according to their ethnicity once a week. Cross-cultural and language learning is also common in all the 4 provinces. Most participants related that younger generations are not so interested in learning the language of their group; they find their language irrelevant to their daily life and prefer to speak Thai. However, other aspects of their culture such as cultural practices, rituals, dancing and food are still largely uphold by younger generations.

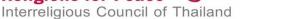
Chiangmai dialogue:

At Chiangmai dialogue most participants acknowledged that differences in terms of ethnicity and religion of the people are one of the features found in most multicultural societies. One participant addressed the types of multicultural society quite interestingly; she said 'there are three types of multicultural society and we can compare them with three kinds of fruit: a grape, an apple and an orange. In a grape multicultural society groups loosely unite, they retain their differences and only join one another when necessary. Social cohesion in this case is not strong as each grape could fall of the branch at any time. In apple multicultural society, all groups are forced to merge and blend with one another, creating one unifying whole. All groups lose their traits and uniqueness. In the orange multicultural society each group still retains its traits and links to other groups with thin web of fiber. The orange one seems to be ideal type for multicultural society. But it is not very often that we can see this one manifested.' Most participants agreed that understanding and acceptance of difference among the people served as a basis for a genuine and long-lasting multicultural society

Our Chiangmai participants mentioned also the process of nation-building as the key obstacle for the construction of a multicultural society. Chiangmai has been a vibrant city with people of various ethnicity living side-by-side, coexisting and mingling with one another. Enculturation—simply meaning the process in which an ethnic group borrows or adopts other group's cultural practices—was not uncommon. The Chinese Muslims of Chiangmai is one vivid example of how cultural practices intermingle, creating hybrid identity with strike uniqueness. Classification of people into group and stereotyping them with prejudice just started recently with the emergence of nation-state and nationalism concept. This normally leads to the social fragmentation first and then ethnic chauvinism. Minority groups also have to struggle to fit into the society and also to prove themselves worthy enough to be Thai citizens while ethnic Thai group does not have to. When there is a strong group misperception among ethnic groups in the society, intolerance is likely to manifest. This is a kind of social phenomenon contributing to the failure in the construction of a genuine multicultural society.

Most participants agreed that during the past decade Chiangmai has experienced an influx of people who come to work and also reside rather permanently. These people bring with them their culture, religion practices and life-style that would add to the already diverse social tapestry of the city. Rapid urbanization, modernization and globalization is also one of the challenges Chiangmai is facing. Traditional Chiangmai is now changing to something much more cosmopolitan in nature and interaction between diverse groups of people who are not necessarily of Lan Na culture become intense. New comers also wish to make Chiangmai their home. These requires Chiangmai people to be much more tolerant and understanding. Participants expressed positive attitude on the co-existence of the people in this changing context. The only thing they concern about is how economic and political interest would come between the people, causing them to mistreat others under the pretext of ethnic-religious difference.

2) The participants make concrete suggestions regarding the establishment of multicultural society in Thailand and propose them to the government agencies





• Issues or obstacles to better interaction and relationship among communities and how to concretely and meaningfully tackle those obstacles

Surin dialogue:

Most participants noted these following issues as obstacles for peaceful coexistence and for the construction of a genuine multicultural society: prejudice, stereotyping of other groups, closed-mindedness of the people, pro-Thai mainstream history lesson and overall education provided by the state, the lack of information or knowledge on ethnic minority groups (e.g. their belief and practices, place of origin, and language), state policies discriminating minority groups, clash of group interests, competition for resources by ethnic groups, and national and local politics that divide people into sides and go against one another. From these issues, participants voted for top 4 issues that needed immediate attention and actions. The 4 issues were mainstream history and education, prejudice and perception of the people, state policy and implementation, and discriminations by leaders.

No. of	Issue as obstacle to multicultural society	Concrete suggestions for tackling the obstacle
issue		
1.	mainstream history and education The way history is taught to children and youth in most state-run schools all over the country does not allow rooms for minority's narratives. Mainstream history used for lessons and classes is the one from the perspective of the state and ethnic Thai. Sometimes information appearing in history books published by Ministry of Education is incorrect if viewed from minority group's perspective. Most participants remarked that the shortcoming of education system, especially on issues related to teaching of history, lied in these 4 factors: inadequate or incorrect information about a particular section of history, teachers are not skilled enough, local and well-respected community 'scholars' are not allowed to participate in history teaching and curriculum is not properly designed to communicate multiculturalism.	There are steps to be taken in order to tackle this issue and the state should be the one taking the lead in these steps: -implementing of new education policy should reflect these 3 principles: preservation of tradition, practice of those tradition, and adaptation of tradition by community members to make sure it fit with present context. -Creating a more localized curriculum for elementary and secondary schools. The curriculum used in Isan Tai should consist of core and localized features with the latter having higher proportion. -In these localized features students would learn about the uniqueness of their region, ethnicity of those living in their region as well as local history. -allowing local scholars to serve as history teachers at schools and letting young people learn history and cultural practices from these local scholars -setting up institution or council working on ethnic interaction and ethnic identity maintenance -establishing more platforms for cross- ethnic/religious group learning among



No. of issue	Issue as obstacle to multicultural society	Concrete suggestions for tackling the obstacle
2.	prejudice and perception of the people Prejudice is socially-constructed; we learn from various socialization agents—namely our family, our school, our peer groups and the media—about ourselves, our group, and those belonging to different groups. If we can internalize these negative connotations about others, we also can learn to see others with positive light. Meaningful social interaction between groups—not social separation—will facilitate inter-group trust building and better understanding about one another.	To reconstruct positive attitude among other culturally diverse groups, it is crucial to engage them in action. Learning in class without meaningful face-to-face interaction will not eliminate prejudice and foster social bond among group. They proposed actors in the society to create what they called at this initial state as '<u>community cultural learning program'</u> . This program should consist of active learning via activities initiated by community members of diverse ethnicity. The activities of this program can vary from community to community, depending on what the community finds beneficial for their people.
3.	state policy and implementation Since the Cold War period, Thai state adopted several approaches regarding minority groups; sometimes it applied integrationist one while in other times it imposed assimilationist approach. During the past decades it also addressed on many occasions the concept of multiculturalism. It also established in 2006 the Ethnic Affairs Institute (EAI) under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. This act signaled that it tried to protect and promote rights of minority groups and, to some extent, entertain the policy on multiculturalism. However, multiculturalism has never been set as national agenda.	The participants proposed strongly these following actions: -setting multiculturalism policy as state's agenda with subsequent regulations to be implemented at all levels and in every part of the country -this policy, before being announced to the public, should be drafted by the state and other stakeholders (civil society sectors, ngos, and grassroots actors) -this policy should take into account the principles of Human Rights, Cultural Rights of indigenous people and non-discrimination.
4.	discriminations by leaders In Surin and some other countries in Isan Tai, communities are interacting well and peaceful coexistence is a way of life. However, in some areas where a community consists of various ethnic groups, community members are not being treated equally by their leaders. A participant, a Kui woman, who proposed this	The group proposed concrete solution to this problem as follows: -setting clear serving term for community leader . For example, a village head can only serve for two consecutive terms, each term for 2 years. This is to avoid the abuse of power and the use of influence for personal gain.

Interreligious Council of Thailand



No. of	Issue as obstacle to multicultural society	Concrete suggestions for tackling the obstacle
issue		
	issue as obstacle towards the construction of a genuine multicultural experienced bad treatment from her community leader who is of different ethnicity from herself. Cronyism is being practiced in a wider scale and corruption is likely to follow. Mistreatment and socio-economic discrimination based on ethnicity and religion affiliation become common. The people are feeling hopeless and struggling to make their voice heard.	-setting up a vetting system with which a community leader is put under investigation if a complaint is logged against him/her. -promoting good governance at local and grassroots level with strong participation of the people.

Chiangmai dialogue:

There are about 8 issues that our participants addressed as current obstacles for peaceful coexistence and the construction of a genuine multicultural society. They are as follows: negative attitude and prejudice towards people of different groups, state policy and implementation of such policy, groups competing for resources, leaders with bias and discriminating attitude, education that is so lacking in terms of promoting understanding of ethno-religious differences among younger generations, hate speech via social media, the lack of awareness on the importance of multiculturalism among citizens, and politics both at local and national levels. It can be said that the issues drawn from this group of participants are not much different from the ones we got from Surin dialogue. From these 8 broad issues participants voted for 3 key issues to be discuss in details (they are 1) negative attitude or prejudice towards other group, 2) groups competing for resource, and 3) the lacking education. They later brainstormed for concrete solution and the result of discussion are shown in the following table.

No. of	Issue as obstacle to multicultural society	Concrete suggestions for tackling the obstacle
issue		
1.	Negative attitude/Prejudice towards other	The only to eliminate prejudice is to increase
	groups	meaningful social interaction and learning of
		different culture and religion. Prejudice is
	Similar to participants of Surin dialogue, the	usually derived from wrong assumption.
	participants of our Chiangmai dialogue also	Therefore, it is crucial to create a platform or
	viewed that there is an increase in prejudice	space for interaction and learning together.
	among people of Chiangmai. Groups tend to	
	be labeled negatively. For example, an Aka	This social platform should be constructed by
	lady related that ethnic Thai of town (Khon	leading organizations of each ethno-religious
	Mueng) still pass on the perception of Aka	groups with support from the state and local
	group as 'dirty', 'backward' and 'uncivilized'.	authority. It can also be carried out face-to-
	She further noted that it is true that in the past	face or online. Younger generations would
	her group adhered to some traditional beliefs	prefer to use social media for interaction than
	that clashed with the concept of human	the older generations. Combining both
	rights. But culture is not static. The group has	traditional way of interaction with online
	discarded some old practices and adopted	interaction would answer to the needs and
	new ones. Hence, the perception of the	preference of different generations. This



No. of issue	Issue as obstacle to multicultural society	Concrete suggestions for tackling the obstacle
	people outside the group remains the same due to the lack of understanding on the changing nature of culture. Some participants also added that closed-mindedness and ignorance of the people also serves as underlining factor contributing to prejudice and discrimination.	platform will serve as an agent of socialization for the people of Chiangmai and helps in reducing prejudice among ethnic and religious groups as well as promoting social cohesion and sense of belonging to the same society.
2.	Groups competing for resources and power and interest Tension between groups in our society is likely to come from the perception that they perceive one another as competitors. When resources are limited or scared and there is no properly designed system for the equal distribution of those resources to groups in the society, groups have to find the way to strive for what they want. In most societies majority tends to rule and come up with policies that benefit themselves first. Minority groups are being sidelined and struggle to be heard. The key question is how to divide power to groups and make sure their need and concern are taken into account.	In order to tackle the issue of imbalance of power that lead to unfair distribution of resources and benefits, it is crucial to set a healthy decision-making process for the society. This decision-making process or structure should include representatives of all ethnic groups found in the society. The representatives involving in this structure should have strong support by their people and speak for them. There should also have some sort of check and balance mechanism for all organizational units, especially the ones run by the government. The state should allow more participation from the private and civil society sectors in the running of the city. Interreligious council is already established in Chiangmai. It is a kind of mechanism used for promoting group relation and unity in the society.
3.	The lacking education promoting intergroup understanding and tolerance Education system in Chiangmai, similar to any other Thai city, is laid out by the government. Curriculum and other related features are designed by the Ministry of Education. Local teachers or officers of each province play no part in the curriculum design; they just have to adopt and use whatever is present in the curriculum in their classes. It is known that the content on multiculturalism is largely missing from these curriculums. Ethnic minority groups are mentioned in the textbooks as a part of groups constituting Thailand as a nation. However, they are not described in details and more often than not are labeled as a 'product' for tourism industry of the country. Teachers also lack the knowledge	Local communities around Thailand, not only of Chiangmai acknowledge that there is a serious problem in Thailand education system. Educational actors in each region are not really participating in the drafting of curriculum for their own use. In order to tackle this issue and increase regional actors' participation in promoting intergroup understanding and tolerance, the participants proposed 3 strategies that should be launched simultaneously. All of them are to promote local leaders and institution's roles in education for children and youth: 1) bottom-up curriculum design process—each region should identify actors for curriculum drafting and try to insert lessons on regional knowledge more than 40% of the whole curriculum. National actors on



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No. of Issue as obstacle to multicultural society Concrete suggestions for tackling the obstacle issue and true understanding on multiculturalism education should pay very little role and ethno-religious differences. Learning in this process, allowing great degree process is also inadequate in terms of creating of decentralization in Thailand's deep understanding that should come from education system. student learning first-hand about ethno-2) Role model multicultural school—this religious differences via social interaction and school will act as key agent for socialization on regionalism and cross-community activities. proper understanding of ethnic and religious groups for children and youth. It should collaborate with local ethnic and religious communities and comes up with a curriculum that includes not only in-class learning activities but also field-visits to communities. This is for young people to learn first-hand about ethnic and religious interaction in their own area. If possible, should be set up in each province. 3) Capacity enhancing program for **teachers**—once we have the properly designed curriculum and the role model school, another feature that is also equally important is capable teachers to run the school and implement the curriculum. Teachers for elementary and secondary schools around Thailand need to be motivated more. Their teaching capacity is needed enhancing. It is also crucial to get teachers who value peaceful coexistence, the multiculturalism and equality to all. This program aims to create this type of teacher.

3) The participants build relationships with different religious groups which will lead to further collaborations in the future

It was addressed at both dialogues that dialogue is a platform for people to come, exchange and broaden their perspective on a situation they view as needed immediate solution. After brainstorming for a day and a field visit to see the current state on intergroup interaction and coexistence, we asked participants to think of some future collaboration they and their network could do together. The result of the discussion is listed below.





Surin dialogue:

Topics and types of collaboration drawn from World Café session and further discussed for concrete plan on the last day of the dialogue are as follows:

Topic/project	Brief activity plan	Leader of the project and participants (they are among dialogue participants)
 Multiethnic-religious Network for South Isan <u>Rationale and objectives</u>: to enhance collaboration between ethnic and religious groups (the Khmer. Laotian, Kui, Chinese and Muslim) in South Isan and boost collaboration on issues of concern to all 	First year plan consists of these following steps: -identify network members (e.g. leaders of ethnic and religious communities in South Isan -organize face-to—face meeting among member to 1) set network's structure e.g. select chairperson and committees and 2) draft annual activity plan. Activities should promote intergroup interaction and relationship and understanding regarding beliefs and practice of groups in South Isan first and then they can be extended to cover other regions of Thailand. -create online social media group to connect all members and share news and updates	Mr. Bunmee Bunleng (an environmental activist) Dr. Domkheng Thothong(a Kui scholar) Mr. Surawit Siripanichsakon (Kui community leader of Surin) Mr. Withaya Bunchawee (Ubonrachathani's Ngo Network)
 2. 'Tai Ban' Research project (Local Southern Isan research project) <u>Rationale and objectives</u>: To collect in-depth information on language, history and local wisdom (traditional medicine and the like) of three major ethnic groups in South Isan namely Khmer, Kui and Laotian 	1-year project with 3 sub-research projects -write literature review, identify research questions (particularly on the history and origin of these three groups in Surin as there are some contesting information on this) and data collecting techniques as well as research assistants -collect data by interviewing and focus group discussion -conduct data analysis and writer research report -present and disseminate research findings	Participants who are lecturers at universities. For example, Dr. Somporn Hinkam (Laotian scholar), Ms. Pakwilai Sahunalu (Khmer activist and local historian), and Mr. Sompong Thawichart (Kui scholar and activist)
 Multicultural Media and Youth project <u>Rationale and objectives</u>: 	1-year project with activities on three phases: Phase 1: capacity building for a group of targeted youths of south Isan on media	Ven. Somporn Silatehcho who runs a meditation center at Aung Lampok area in Surin. Before ordained as a monk he used to be an



Topic/project	Brief activity plan	Leader of the project and participants (they are among dialogue participants)
To create a platform for interaction for youth of all ethnic groups To enhance youth's media literacy and encourage them to use media in spreading interethnic/religious understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence as well as the love of homeland	literacy (both mainstream and social media) Phase 2: workshop for those trained youths to design activities for intergroup understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence Phase 3: youths organize the activities they designed with supervision from the project team	activist working on various environmental issues. Now he and another monk work with youth and try to have them engaged in community-related project as well as raise awareness on cultural preservation.
 4. Multicultural policy monitoring group Rationale and objectives: To create a platform for citizens to communicate their opinion on the desirable multiculturalism policies to the authority 	 1-year project with three steps: identify multiculturalism policies and laws that are currently in use create an open discussion on 1 or 2 key problematic policies and laws with participation of all stakeholders present the outcome of discussion to the authority and have them exchange with citizens 	Mr. Muk Sulaiman (MP of Pattani) Mrs. Farida Sulaiman (former MP of Surin) Ms. Pakwilai Sihunalu (a Khmer activist)

Chiangmai dialogue:

Topics and types of collaboration drawn from World Café session and further discussed for concrete plan on the last day of the dialogue are as follows:

Topic/project	Activity plan	Leader of the project and participants (they are among dialogue participants)	
1. Network for the	1-year activity plan of this network with	Mr. Saksan Sumontri, leader	
Protection of Nature and	activities focusing on 4 areas: raising	of Ethnic Council of	
Environment Rationale and objectives:	awareness on the effects of deforestation, campaigning for each	Chiangmai	
To raise awareness on deforestation and promote forest growth in the north region To enhance human-nature coexistence	household to grow 1 tree, tree's ordination (a ceremony related to Buddhism for the protection of trees), and enhancing knowledge of citizens on waste management and recycling. The project will target ethnic and	Ms. Prapha Wongjomporn, representative of Pakakayor group, Sankampang, Chiangmai	
	religious communities in Chiangmai		



Topic/project	Activity plan	Leader of the project and participants (they are among dialogue participants)
2. Multiculturalism-	(Omkoi district) first and then extend its target groups to other areas within the northern region. It will collaborate with local authorities and agencies working on environmental issues.	Father Paisan
2. Multiculuralishi- promoting media <u>Rationale and objectives</u> : To create multimedia promoting peaceful coexistence among ethnic groups in the north region	 1-year project aiming to produce some multimedia/infographic/Youtube clips about ethnic-religious coexistence and peaceful principles/stories drawn from religious texts and local tales. Step 1: the team will ask ethnic and religious communities in Chiangmai to propose stories (historical or fictional) that can relate the practicality of people of different ethnic and religious identity (or any other form of difference) living together peacefully. Step 2: the team will produce multimedia/infographic or Youtube video clip and viewing trail among selected groups of audience to get feedback. Step 3: Once the materials are ready, they will be launched via various online channels and also mainstream news channels. 	Themarunrung, Catholic Council, Chiangmai Mr. Kittinan Thinnachat, Parent-teacher association, Pattai Municipal School, Pattani
3. Network of Religions for Health Rationale and objectives: To convene members of 5 ethnic and religious communities found in Chiangmai to work together on health-related issues	1-year project with members of religious community set as target groups. The team will be collaborating with the already active group of religious communities working on health issues and the interreligious council of Chiangmai. The activities are designed to tackle to issues: physical and mental well-being. For physical well-being, the team will organize activities related to exercise while for the mental one, a series of meditation and other form of mental exercises will be carried out.	Ven. Phra Maha Bunchuy Doojai, MCU, Chiangmai campus Ms. Wandee Chaisin, member of Wat Katkaram Community, Chiangmai University



4) The participants learn the principles of dialogue and be able to practice it within their own people

It has been Religions for Peace Thailand and IHRP to **mainstream** dialogue process/culture into society and institution. By mainstreaming, we mean to educate the public and leaders of all levels about dialogue, its characteristics and process as well as to make them realize that dialogue can be used as means to build better understanding, transform conflicts and prevent violence.

In both of our dialogues, facilitators introduced the dialogue process stressing dialogue essence which are deep-listening, abstaining from judgement before listening carefully and respecting one another. Our *RfP* Thailand facilitators also tried to engage participants in various form of popularly used dialogue namely Open Space Dialogue, World Café Dialogue, and Circle Dialogue. In group discussions, participants were also given guidelines on how to constructively engage in the discussion and listen to opposite opinions. Most participants expressed via questionnaire distributed at the end of dialogue that they have learn a lot about dialogue process and will incorporate the knowledge into their future activities.

• Qualitative and quantitative indicators (the below information is derived from questionnaire distributed to participants at the last day of the activity)

No.	Set indicators	Data from registration sheets and questionnaire reply		
1.	The number of participants not less than 80 percent of expected number (between 60-70 participants)	There were 64 ethnic and religious leaders participated in our two dialogues, according to our registration sheets. This number account for 91.4% of the expected number of participants set at 70 persons.		
2.	80 percent of participants gain academic knowledge and rate their satisfaction with the activity process in a good level	49 participants (25 for Surin dialogue and 25 for Chiangmai dialogue) filled in our short questionnaire distributed at the end of the last day and their replies are as follows:		
		 24 out of 25 persons (96%) from Surin dialogue and 22 out of 24 persons (91.6%) from Chiangmai dialogue expressed that they have gained academic knowledge regarding the concept of multiculturalism and interethnic/interreligious interaction from the activities. 24 out of 25 persons (96%) from Surin dialogue and 23 out of 24 persons (95.8%) from Chiangmai dialogue said that they were satisfied with the process of the activity, how facilitators from <i>RfP</i> Thailand led the sessions, and the facilities and food/beverages provided by the hotels. 		
		All 25 and 24 participants (100%) who answered the questionnaire replied that they wish to see <i>RfP</i> Thailand or Mahidol University organizing this type of dialogue again in the future.		





• Social media and news media engagement:

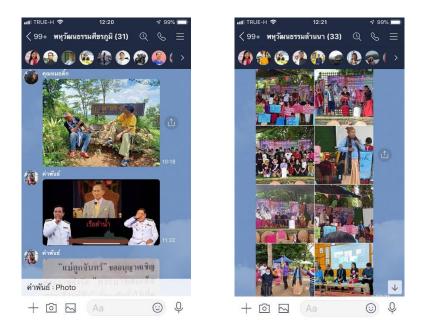
In Chiangmai, our dialogue captured the attention of a local news media with a linkage to the Muslim Chaingmai group. The representatives of the group came to our event and interviewed some of our participants as well as the *RfP* Thailand's Advisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gothom Arya. The short clip of the interview was posted on Muslim Chiangmai News Channel and on various youtube channels. One of them is https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYfrNOfg7jU.



เวทีสานเสวนา [:] พลังกลุ่มศาสนา มหาวิทยาลัยม...

ข่าวมุสลิมเชียงใหม่ อ... 143 views · 1 year ago

• Future communication and keeping network alive: **Two Line Application groups** are created on the last day of dialogue and they are still actively used by the participants.



5. Five Religions Guidebook for Mutual Understanding and Respects between Religious Communities

• Background and rationale of the activity:

In recent years there has been a lot of misunderstanding between religious followers in Thailand on proper principles and practices of 5 religions (Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hindusim, and Sikhism).



A Buddhist man usually has very limited knowledge on way of life or rituals of his Muslim friend and viceversa. Seeking to learn about religions apart from one own is rather difficult as there is no existing guidebook in Thai language that can provide a correct, up-to-date, and informative text on principles and practices of 5 religions in one go. Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand had discussed this issue at its 2018 annual meeting and viewed that the council had resource persons with great ability to help promoting mutual understanding between religious communities on this particular issue. This 5 religions guidebook will be the first of its kind and a prime output of members of IRC Thailand after working together for peace for a decade.

<u>Target groups:</u>

This guidebook will be beneficial to various parties. Once produced it will be a sort-after reference book for schools and agencies that wish to promote better understanding between Thais of different religious backgrounds. After a brief period of announcing the idea of producing the book, an IRC committee member received an overwhelming good response with a number of demands for the book among Muslim community in the South.

- <u>Output and outcome</u>: Apart from a 100 pages guidebook, this activity will be able to achieve these following outcomes: 1) enhancing the sense of solidarity among IRC committee members; 2) making the council name become more familiar outside three southernmost provinces and
- <u>Set Budget:</u> 2,234.28 USD or 70,000 Baht (*RfP* Thailand has yet to receive this amount from *RfP* International)

	Process	March-April 2019	May-June 2019	July- September 2019	October- December 2019
1.	Team meets for planning for content of the guidebook and selection of suitable author (s) for each section from within IRC	\checkmark			
2.	Authors of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity sections prepare the draft (15-20 pages per one religion)	~	1	√	
3.	Authors of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity sections submitted their draft (15-20 pages per one religion)				\checkmark

• Process and development until end of 2019:

At the end of 2019 the drafts of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity were sent to reviewers to proofread the content. *RfP* Thailand secretariat office are waiting for the draft from our Hindu and Sikh authors and they are expected to finish by early 2020. This guidebook project will continue in 2020 with the review by IRC Council members and the printing and distributing of the book to various religious schools and training centers and trainers.

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6. Conclusion and plan for 2020

Due to the success of 2019 dialogue, our initial plan for 2020 is to organize interreligious dialogues to under the same theme of 2019. The goal is to gain knowledge on the understanding of the concept of multiculturalism in other parts of Thailand, central and the southern regions which were the two targeted areas set in our original plan at the beginning of 2019 prior to the budget cut. After the two dialogues at the center and the southern region are conducted, the secretariat team will analyze the data and come up with a report on the current state of interreligious-ethnic interaction of Thailand and what need to be done in order to construct a genuine multicultural society for Thailand. Roles of religious communities will also be highlighted as we believe that religious actors and communities are assets, not liability, when it comes to creating social cohesion and acceptance among groups in the society. Apart from the two dialogues set as activities for 2020, we will also complete our 5 religions guidebook project that we have started with the drafting of the book since late 2018. The guidebook will be distributed to schools and religious sites in the three southernmost provinces and then to those in other regions. The guidebook will help children, youth, as well as adult to have simple understanding on the beliefs and practice of key religions found in Thailand and the peaceful elements found in their teaching. The network of IRC Thailand's Women of Faith for Peace (WFP) and Youth of Faith for Peace (YFP) will also be strengthened via online platform we established (facebook group and LINE group). The secretariat office also plans to come up with RfP Thailand Newsletter that will be published online every quarter of the year (4 issues a year). The newsletter will greatly help in promoting the work of *RfP* Thailand to the general public.

7. Detailed Financial Report for 2019

	Balance left from 2018 and total budget received from <i>RfP</i> International in 2019 and early 2020 to cover expenses of 2019	Total in Thai Bath	Total in USD
1	Balance 2018	150,951.95	4,629.01
2	Budget for Thailand's Consultation Meeting April 25, 2019 (Date of transferring/receiving: July 24,2019)	68,572.50	2,230.00
3	Budget for <i>RfP</i> Thailand 2019 (Date of transferring/receiving: January 28,2020)	171,472.00	5,600.00
	total	<u>390,996.45</u>	<u>12,459.01</u>

Exchange rate 1USD: 31.38 Thai Baht in Jan 2020



	Total Expenses of 2019	Total in Thai Baht	Total in USD
1	<i>RfP</i> Thailand's coordinator salary: January -December 2019 (month x THB: 12 x 18,000)	216,000.00	6,625.77
2	Less Commission (Charged at <i>RfP</i> Thailand side when transferred: July 24,2019)	300.00	9.76
3	Total expenses for Thailand's Consultation Meeting April 25, 2019	64,669.82	2,103.08
4	ACRP Secretariat Meeting 18 January 2019	7,243.00	235.54
5	Funeral host Phrakhru Prachotrattananurak /wreath (23 January 2019)	6,000.00	195.12
6	Website Domain, Hosting Annual fee 2019	876.33	28.50
7	Brochure 2019	9,951.00	323.61
8	RfP Thailand's coordinator's Insurance 2019	750.00	24.39
9	Visiting basket Assoc. Prof. Dr.Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (21 September 2019)	1,040.00	33.82
10	Translation fee	2,000.00	65.04
11	Fieldwork to Surin (2 April 2019)	15,339.40	498.84
12	Less Commission (Charged by the bank at <i>RfP</i> Thailand side when transferred: January 28, 2020)	428.68	14.00
13	Project Management 2019	20,000.00	613.50
14	Account auditing 2019	2,000.00	61.35
		<u>346,598.23</u>	<u>10,832.33</u>

Exchanged rate 1 USD: 31.99 Thai Baht in Feb 2020

Balance sheet as of March 2020		
Total Budget received from <i>RfP</i> International in July 2019 and Jan 2020	390,996.45	12,459.01
Total Expenses of 2019	346,598.23	10,832.33
Remaining Amount in <i>RfP</i> Thailand Account	<u>44,398.22</u>	<u>1,626.68</u>

Exchange rate 1USD: 27.29 Thai Baht in March 2020