

Report of Activity 2023

(January – December 2023)



‘Transformative Peacebuilding for Thailand and Beyond’

By

Religions for Peace Thailand
www.rfpthailand.com

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1. Rational and Background:

2023 was a crucial year for the whole world. It was the year that Covid19 pandemic was curbed and the world started to return to its normalcy. There were no more restrictions issued and implemented by states and social distancing was no longer practiced in a stricter manner as it was in 2021 and 2022. After 3 years of set-back and, perhaps, a pause for reflection, peacebuilders around the world were eager to resume their works in 2023. There had been a good vibe and vast opportunities for peacebuilding both at local and international levels. At the international level, 2023 was marked by attempts of the UN Peacebuilding Commission to strengthen its partnership with stakeholders across continents with a strong focus on development for peace, preventive culture and Women Peace Security (WPS) and Youth Peace Security (YPS) agendas.¹

In Thailand, the government had, since the middle of 2022, relaxed its social distancing measures and other Covid-19 restrictions, allowing socio-economic activities, including peacebuilding ones targeted the restive southern region, to resume. By the end of 2022 when all of the measures and rules were completed lifted, large volume of peace initiatives and activities were actively implemented in the three southernmost provinces both by local and international actors. Moreover, peace dialogue between Thai government and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) which had been delayed because of Covid-19 also restarted this year. In 2023 Thailand also had new democratically elected government after more than a decade of dictatorial regime. With all these conditions, 2023 was, therefore, a year Thais expect to see positive changes in many aspects, including the long-standing ethnic conflict in the deep south which, for 2 decades, has caused more than 7,200 lives.

Religions for Peace Thailand projected a great deal of opportunities for peacebuilding and conflict transformation for the southern region, its key targeted area for project implementation since 2009. Responding to the international and regional communities' call for inclusivity in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, we attempted to engage more with marginalized actors and vulnerable groups like women and youths and to support them to be better agents of change for their communities.

2. Goal and Objectives

To continue with its works of 2022, Religions for Peace Thailand set *transformative peacebuilding* as its focus. With this framework, we aimed to use our interreligious network and platform as means to create transformations for individuals and their communities. Our target groups for this year are 1) religious leaders (both male and female) and 2) youths. Our objectives for 2023 are as follows:

1) to enhance roles and visibility of our interreligious council where key religious leaders have worked together for peace of the south since 2009;

2) to strengthen capacity for peace of youths of the three southernmost provinces and of Asia.

¹ See more <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/peacebuilding-commission-begins-2023-renewed-focus-prevention>

3. Key Activities of 2023

In order to achieve our objectives, we had implemented a number of activities. The summary of our key activities can be viewed in the table below. Activity 1 and 2 were designed for the fulfillment of objective 1 while activity 3 and 4 were aligned with objective 2. For activity 4, *development for peace* approach was observed as the underlining principle.

No.	Activity	Participants	Period of Implementation	Expenses /Funding source
1.	Interreligious Council of Thailand meeting, organized quarterly via Zoom application (4 times)	About 12-15 IRC members attended the meetings	Meeting 1 April 5 th , 2023 Meeting 2 June 26 th , 2023 Meeting 3 September 25 th , 2023 Meeting 4 December 14 th , 2023	No expense, using resources of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University
2.	5 Religions Guidebook book launch event	Open to the public. 465 Facebook users joined the event.	Via Zoom and Facebook Live 28 October 2023	No expense, using resources of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University
3.	Digital Youth Harmony for Peace (2022/2023 Flagship Project of Religions for Peace Asia) (see a separate narrative report for this activity)	4 Religions for Peace National Chapters and 3 Peacebuilding NGOs in South and Southeast Asia	April 2022- March 2023	10,000 USD Asia Conference for Religions for Peace (ACRP)
4.	Building Resilient and Sustainable Life for Out-of-School, Marginalized and Underprivileged Youths of Yala (START-UP Project for Youth of Yala) (see a separate narrative report for this activity)		July – December 2023	3,000 USD International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) Via their Sombath-Somphone Memorial Fund 2023

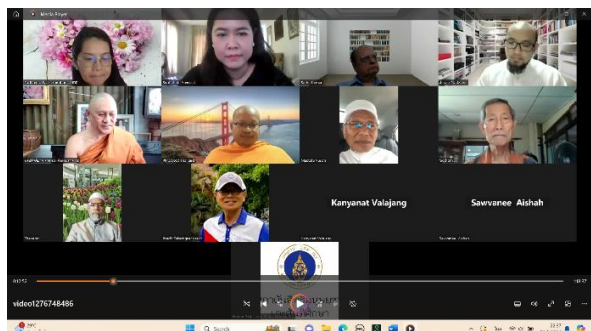
Since activity 3 and 4 have their own full narrative reports, here we discuss only activity 1 and activity 2.

- **Interreligious Council Meetings (quarterly)**

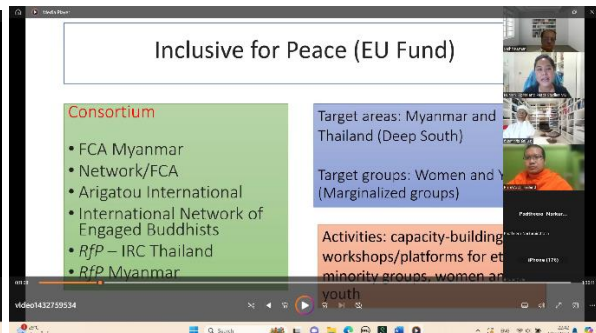
In May 18th-19th, 2009, five years after the recent episode of violence striking Thailand's three Southernmost provinces, more than 60 religious and community leaders and representatives of the southern region and beyond gathered at the C.S. Pattani Hotel, Pattani

to seek ways to ease the violent conflict. Realizing the role and responsibility of religion and its components in establishing peace, reconciliation, and harmony, they unanimously agreed that a multi-religious mechanism was to be set up in order to serve as a platform for interreligious cooperation for peace, support peace process, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence not just for the three southernmost provinces but for Thai society as a whole. **Interreligious Council of Thailand** (known for short as IRC Thailand) was then established in order to be the mechanism serving those purposes.

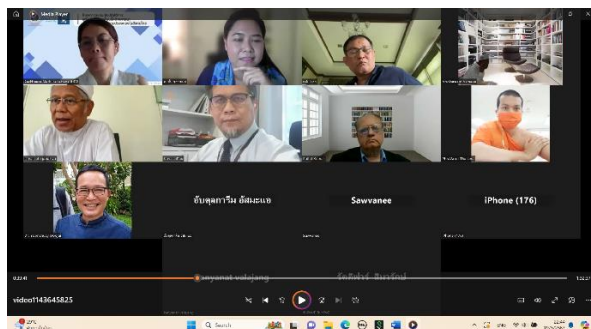
Every year members of Interreligious Council of Thailand meet to discuss strategies and work plan for peace in the southern region. This year the meetings were convened via Zoom application quarterly on April 5th, June 26th, September 25th and December 14th respectively. The meetings were facilitated by Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, Secretary-General of RfP Thailand and Secretary of IRC. Minutes of meeting were written in Thai and reviewed by all council members. Apart from this official meeting, there were also some ad-hoc meetings being convened to address some urgent matters. The council members also communicate regularly via LINE application group 'IRC Thailand'.



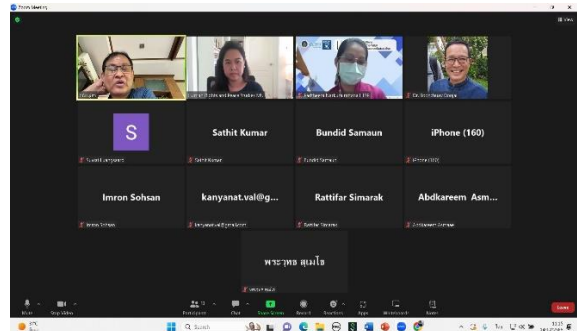
1st meeting on April 5th



2nd meeting on June 26th



3rd meeting on September 25th



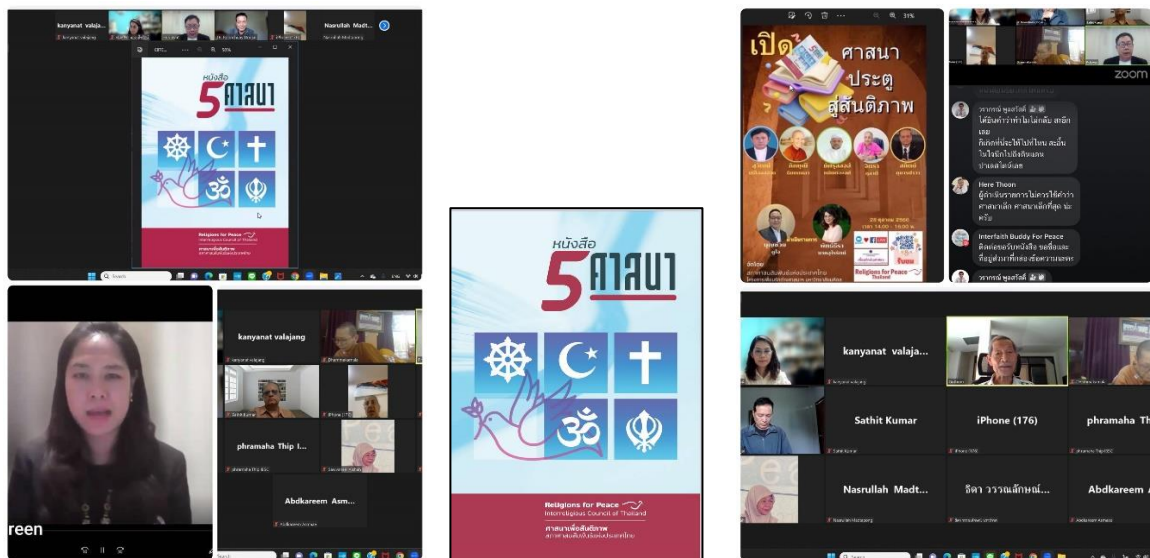
4th meeting on 14th December

For the 4 meetings convened this year, our council members had done these following actions which led to the consolidation of collaboration for peace among 5 religious communities (Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism): updating one another on the current ethno-religious situation of the south and other parts of Thailand, addressing key strategies used at the particular moment to tackle ethno-religious tension and enhance peaceful coexistence, planning for immediate concrete actions like issuing a statement calling

for peace for certain conflicts or violent incidents occurring in Thailand and beyond. For example, they met and discussed via Zoom at the beginning of October Palestine-Israeli conflict and later came up with a statement (see Annex 1) to ask for the conflicting parties to find ways to stop violence and to urge the media, especially Thai media, to be strictly neutral in their reporting and present news based on facts only.

- **5 Religions Guidebook Book Launch Event, 28 October 2023 via Zoom and Facebook live**

During Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022), IRC Thailand members came up with the idea to promote better understanding and reducing stereotyping regarding religious groups in Thailand. It seems that Thai general public still lack a knowledge—be it religious teaching or practices—on 5 religions officially recognized by Thai state. The lack of such knowledge could lead to misperception, hatred, intergroup tension and social discriminations under the name of religion. Representatives of 5 religions namely Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism then attempted to fill the knowledge gap by collaborating for a book project called ‘**5 Religions Guidebook**’. This guidebook is aimed to provide readers with some key teaching and practices of the 5 religions as well as the stories of how key religious figures of each religion has, in the olden days, played positive roles in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. The 1st edition of book publication (1,000 copies) was sponsored by Religions for Peace International. *RfP* Thailand distributes them to various academic and religious institutions as well as religious sites around Thailand.



5 Religions Guidebook Book Launch Event

28th October 2023 via Zoom and Facebook Live

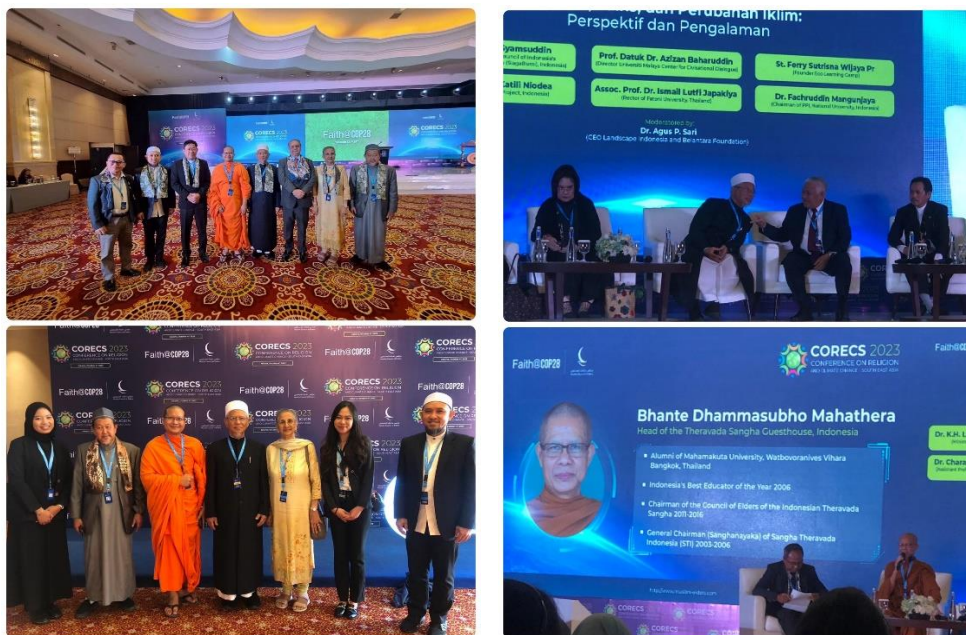
Since 2022 the council had tried to find ways to promote the book. We came up with a short book introduction video clip with our two council presidents discussing key contents of

the book. Later, in October the council organized a book launch event via Zoom and Facebook Live. The 2-hour event was organized on 28th October. It began with a panel discussion with our council members as well as some key figures in our Women of Faith network serving as panelists addressing roles of religion towards peace and social cohesion. Then they urged the audience to equip themselves with knowledge about other religions and interact more with those from outside their religious communities. The event was joined by more than 450 participants and we received good feedbacks as well as requests for copy delivery.

3. Other Activities Related to Our Actors Empowerment

- *Promoting roles of Interreligious Council members (religious leaders) in ASEAN region*

On October 4th-6th, 7 representatives of Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand attended the 2023 Religions and Climate Change Conference (CORECS), in Jakarta, Indonesia. The 7 representatives are Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ismaillutfi Japakiya (Co-President of Religions for Peace-Interreligious Council of Thailand), Ven. Phra Woot Tongmun, Mr. Ahmadomar Chapakia, Father Suwat Luangsa-ard, Mr. Sathit Kumarn, Mrs. Chitra Kulati Sikhism, Mr. Abdulkareem Asma-ae Islam. The CORECS 2023 was convened as a platform for religious leaders in ASEAN region to exchange and find ways to collaborate more concretely to tackle climate change and other environmental issues.



IRC Thailand members attending CORECS 2023 conference in Jakarta, 4th-6th October 2023

- *Promoting our youth leadership*

Mr. Korwit ROUNGPHUET, 25, youth representative of Religions for Peace-Interreligious

Council of Thailand, attended 'ASIA Interfaith Youth Peace Camp', In Manila, the Philippines between 5-8 February. He participated in the activities with youths from other national chapters, such as South Korea, Japan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, the Philippines and Australia. This ASIA Interfaith Youth Peace Camp was organized under the theme of 'ASIA YOUTH AS PEACEBUILDERS' and its activities was designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of youths in various areas/topics. Human trafficking, children's rights, peacebuilding were among the topics of discussion and exchange. The participants exchanged their experience and learned from the experiences of the invited speakers and panelists.



*Youth Representative of RfP Thailand Attended RfP Asia's Interfaith Youth Peace Camp
5-8 February 2023, Manila, the Philippines*

4. Fund raising, networking, partnership building activities

For 2023 Religions for Peace Thailand had interacted with several organizations both of Southeast Asia and beyond for the purposes of fund raising, network working, and partnership building. Some highlights are as follows:

- **Exploring possible collaborations between IRC Thailand and Ministry of Religious Affairs, Saudi Arabia, 6th February 2023**

On 6th February 2023, 8 of our IRC Thailand's members went to Al Meroz hotel located in Bangkok to meet with representatives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Saudi Arabia. They discuss roles of Saudi Arabia in peacebuilding across the globe and how Saudi Arabia see itself as peacebuilding agent for ASEAN region. Our council members led by the Co-President Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ismailutfi Japakiya presented some works of IRC Thailand and also gave the Saudi Arabian representatives our 5 Religions Guidebook. The Saudi Arabian representatives expressed their admiration to IRC



Thailand's efforts for peacebuilding and wishes to provide supports in our future works.

- **Partnership building with Temasek Foundation (Singapore).** Temasek Foundation of Singapore paid us a visit at Mahidol University on February 8th. Its program director Mr. James Chan and his team met with Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, Secretary-General Religions for Peace Thailand and her Team at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University. Dr. Yunyasit presented to Temasek team a brief history of *RfP* Thailand, vision and mission, core competencies, as well as its key achievements during the past years. Of all the areas of focus, Temasek team expressed their interest to learn and collaborate more in the areas of youth empowerment and development for peace.



Below is the news link of Temasek Foundation visit to *RfP* Thailand:


<https://www.facebook.com/216958878435990/posts/pfbid02cSyd9aCniWnKCnRzVHtMp5y8UW/CbVCuU3btUCTs7qtyJ6SF5wepCu49J1kcsKSpXl/?mibextid=Nif5oz>

- **Fund raising via international grant application with a group of regional and international ngos:** Dr. Suphatmet Yunyasit, Secretary-General *RfP* Thailand was approached by the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and Finn Church Aid (FCA), based in Finland, to be one of the co-applicants (consortium) for a European Union grant of 1.7 million Euros promoting peace in Southeast Asian region. The members of the project consortium were the Network, FCA, Arigatou International, International Network of Engaged Buddhists-INEB, two *RfP* National Chapters namely *RfP* Thailand and *RfP* Myanmar. The project was named 'Inclusive Peace' and designed to promote roles of women, youths and other marginalized groups in peacebuilding. The targeted areas will be Myanmar and Southern Thailand. The key activities will be capacity building workshops and platforms for the said target groups. The drafting of proposal with several Zoom meeting was done between May and June 2023. The team had submitted the proposal in July. **Unfortunately, the proposal was not selected by the EU for the grant.** But it was a great learning experience of *RfP* Thailand. The proposal is not a waste as it can be adapted and submitted for other possible call for grant application with some other funders in the future.

5. Brief Financial Report

Since May 2023 Religions for Peace International has stopped giving Religions for Peace Thailand its regular financial support of 10,000 USD annually. In the second half of this year *RfP* Thailand sought its own financial means mainly by applying for grants from other organizations. The budget we received for 2023 was the total of 13,000 USD. It came from 2 funding sources: 10,000 USD from Flagship project scheme under **Religions for Peace Asia** for the project called **Digital Youth Harmony for Peace** (covering the period of 1 year from April

2022-March 2023) and 3,000 USD from the **International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) via its Sompath-Somphone Memorial Fund** for the project called **Building Resilient and Sustainable Life for Out-of-School, Marginalized and Underprivileged Youths of Yala or the Youth Start-Up project** (covering the period of 6 months from July – December 2023). The 13,000 USD was well-spent and the remaining amount was returned to the funder after we submitted the narrative and financial reports.

Religions for Peace 			
Interreligious Council of Thailand			
Account Summary of 2023			
(December 12, 2023)**			
	Amount received from July-September 2023	Total in Thai Baht	Total in USD
1	Remaining amount from 2022	6,502.37	179.78
2	Bank Interest	244.92	6.77
3	Donation from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gothom Arya (IRC Thailand's Advisor)	20,000.00	552.96
4	Donation from Ven. Phra Sirijariyalankan (IRC Thailand's Co-President)	10,000.00	276.48
5	INEB fund for Youth Start-Up project	103,819.00	2,870.39
6	Financial support from RfP International	159,507.13	4,410.05
	total	<u>300,073.42</u>	<u>8,030.90</u>
	Total Expenses of 2023 (July-December 2023)	Total in Thai Baht	Total in USD
1	Expenses from January to May (project coordinator's salary of 5 months, websit domain renting fee, account auditing fee of 2022, extra expenses of 5 religions guidebook, internet, phone bill and other office expenses)	150,000.00	4,147.20
2	RfP Thailand's Coordinator Salary: July 2023 (month x THB: 1 x 20,000)	20,000.00	552.96
3	Auditing fee	2,500.00	69.12
4	Expenses for Youth Start-up project (funded by INEB)	82,000.00	2,267.13
5	Amount transferred back to INEB	21,819.00	603.25
		<u>276,319.00</u>	<u>3,492.47</u>
Account Summary as of December 12, 2023			
	Balance of 2023	300,073.42	8,030.90
	Total expense of 2023	276,319.00	3,492.47
	Amount left in our account	<u>23,754.42</u>	<u>10,920.11</u>
Exchange rate 1 USD: 36.169 Thai Baht at 25 September 2023			

Remark: the amount of 10,000 USD from ACPR, received in April 2022, for the 2022/2023 Flagship project is not concluded in this table. Please see a separate financial report for it

6. Conclusion and Next Steps

Transformative peacebuilding is comprised of some key features. One of them is the transformative actors to carry out transformative plan and initiatives. With activities implemented from January – December 2023, *RfP* Thailand has managed to recreate such actors. When we enhance the roles and visibility of its interreligious council, we strengthen the transformative quality of religious leaders in our council. These actors are of high and middle levels; they have great potentials to transform the society and create a number of change agents from their own networks. When we carried out *Digital Youth Harmony for Peace*, the flagship project sponsored by Religions for Peace Asia and *Youth Start-Up* project supported by INEB, our mission to contribute towards Youth Peace Agenda (YPS) has become not so far reaching. Slowly but surely, we lay stepping stones for our youth empowerment goal of 2024.

Annex 1: IRC Thailand's statement issued on 10 October 2023 on Palestine-Israeli violent conflict

Religions for Peace 
Interreligious Council of Thailand

แถลงการณ์
คณะกรรมการศาสนาสัมพันธ์แห่งประเทศไทย
กรณี เหตุความรุนแรงในพื้นที่ความขัดแย้งปาเลสไตน์-อิสราเอล

คณะกรรมการศาสนาสัมพันธ์แห่งประเทศไทย รู้สึกสลดใจและเป็นกังวลต่อเหตุการณ์ความรุนแรงที่เกิดขึ้นในอิสราเอลเมื่อวันที่ 7 ตุลาคม 2566 ทั้งต่อการปฏิบัติต่อผู้เสียหายอย่างไร้มนุษยธรรม การยกระดับและขยายขอบเขตการใช้ความรุนแรงตอบโต้กันอย่างไม่แยกแยะเป้าหมายอันเป็นการเข้าเติมสถานการณ์ในพื้นที่ความขัดแย้งยืดเยื้อระหว่างชาวปาเลสไตน์และชาวอิสราเอล ก่อให้เกิดการสูญเสียต่อชีวิตและทรัพย์สินของหลายฝ่ายในวงกว้าง โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งผู้บริสุทธิ์ที่เป็นเด็กจำนวนมาก และรวมถึงแรงงานไทยด้วยนั้น

การใช้ความรุนแรงไม่ว่าจากฝ่ายใด ถือเป็นกระทำที่มีอาชญากรรมร้ายได้ด้วยประการทั้งปวง

คณะกรรมการศาสนาสัมพันธ์แห่งประเทศไทย ขอร่วมภาวนาให้ความขัดแย้งครั้งนี้ยุติลงโดยเร็ว ขอแสดงความเสียใจกับทุกฝ่ายที่เกิดความสูญเสีย และขอเป็นกำลังใจแก่ทุกฝ่ายที่จะก้าวข้ามความยากลำบากในครั้งนี้ พร้อมทั้งขอเรียกร้องให้ทุกฝ่ายร่วมมือกันสร้างสันติภาพ ดังต่อไปนี้

1. ขอให้คู่ขัดแย้งทั้งสองฝ่ายหยุดใช้ความรุนแรงตอบโต้กันอย่างมีเลือกหน้า เพื่อปกป้องชีวิตพลเรือนผู้บริสุทธิ์ทุกฝ่ายตามหลักกฎหมายระหว่างประเทศ และตามหลักมนุษยธรรม
2. ขอให้ทั้งสองฝ่ายใช้นิวทาจสันติวิธีในการแก้ปัญหา หากทางออกจากความขัดแย้งด้วยการเจรจาพูดคุย โดยคำนึงถึงการเคารพในศักดิ์ศรีและความเท่าเทียมกันของมวลมนุษยชาติ เพราะการใช้ความรุนแรงยิ่งจะทำให้ความขัดแย้งขยายตัว และไม่ใช้วิถีทางที่นำไปสู่ทางออกที่แท้จริง
3. ขอให้สื่อมวลชนทุกแขนงนำเสนอข้อมูลข่าวสารด้วยความระมัดระวัง คำนึงถึงผลกระทบที่จะเกิดขึ้น ไม่สื่อสารปลุกระดมสร้างวาทกรรมเกลียดชังอันจะทำให้ความขัดแย้งขยายวงกว้าง
4. ขอให้องค์กรสหประชาชาติ รัฐสมาชิกสหประชาชาติ และรัฐบาลไทย แสดงท่าทีที่ไม่สนับสนุนการใช้ความรุนแรงเพื่อปกป้องชีวิตและทรัพย์สินของพลเรือนผู้บริสุทธิ์ทุกฝ่าย โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งพลเรือนที่ไม่มีอาวุธ
5. ขอให้องค์กรสหประชาชาติ รัฐสมาชิกสหประชาชาติ และผู้นำศาสนาหลักของโลกร่วมเรียกร้องให้มีการเจรจาพูดคุยอย่างจริงจังในหลากหลายช่องทางเพื่อยุติปัญหาความขัดแย้ง หากทางออกด้วยสันติวิธีและคำนึงถึงความยุติธรรมสำหรับทุกฝ่าย
6. ขอให้สังคมไทยใช้สติและวิจารณญาณในการทำความเข้าใจสภาพปัญหาความขัดแย้งที่มีมาอย่างยาวนานนับร้อยปีระหว่างชาวปาเลสไตน์และชาวอิสราเอล ซึ่งมีความละเอียดอ่อนอย่างยิ่ง รวมถึงไม่นำเอาปัญหาความขัดแย้งดังกล่าวมาสร้างความแตกแยกในสังคมไทย

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