

Background note:

The year 2016 marks the 12th anniversary of the re-emergence of the violence in the southern border provinces of Thailand. Since 2004, insurgency and counterinsurgency-related violence across the four southern border provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla has resulted in approximately 15,374 violent incidents with 6,543 deaths (of which about 431 or 6.5% were women) and 11,919 injuries (of which about 1,651 or 14% involved women).¹ Of these, 3,925 fatalities are Muslim (60 percent) and 2,618 are Buddhist (40 percent). A total of 7,152 Buddhists (60 percent) and 4,767 Muslims (40 percent) have been injured.² Government agents or those perceived to be the symbol of the “Thai State” – namely, security forces, civil servants, government-hired village-defense forces, and public school teachers – are prime targets for attack.

In addition to direct deaths and casualties, the conflict has impacted women and marginalized groups in a significant way in the past decade. It is estimated that more than 3,000 women have been made widows and heads of households, yet they have limited opportunities to earn their livelihoods and raise their young families in a safe environment. Children under 15 years of age have also been affected in the past decade, mostly with the loss of one or both parents³ (affecting an estimated 9,806 children) but also with casualties totaling 81 deaths and 445 injuries.⁴

The longstanding conflict has affected livelihoods and economic survival, and has dramatically reduced the overall quality of life especially because of the decreased of safety spaces in the region. It has led to growing distrust between the state authorities and local people, and among local populations in some areas. The normalization of the use of violence by most actors (military personnel, insurgency groups and even those involved in criminal activities such as drug dealing and weapon and human trafficking), have built up a significant threat to human security in this conflict-affected region.

In October 2012, UN Women supported and co-organized the first ever National Workshop on Women, Peace and Security with the Department of Women’s Affairs and Family Development to raise awareness and provide background on the international framework to members of the Sub-committee and women leaders from the southern border provinces. One of the outcomes was a decision of the Sub-committee on Women, Peace and Security to develop a National Policy and Strategy on Women, Peace and Security for the first time in Thailand. A consultation on the draft National Strategy was conducted with national partners in July 2015, and further

¹ Deep South Incident Database, <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/dsid>, as of December 2015.

² Deep South Incident Database, <http://prachatai.com/journal/2016/03/64442>, March 2016.

³ Deep South Coordination Center, <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/dsj/8415>, April 2016

⁴ Deep South Incident Database, <http://radioforchild.org>, March 2016

consultations were conducted with government, civil society and women's group stakeholders in the Deep South.

The Women's Agenda for Peace or PAW, a consortium of 23 Muslim and Buddhist women's groups working to support the peace process, in April 2016 initiated "Safe Public Spaces for Women in the Southern Border Provinces" calling for armed groups, the Thai Government, and civil and community networks to provide the "Safe Spaces" for women and other civilians. The proposed safe spaces covers public areas (such as markets, main roads, schools, mosques/temples and other places of worship, and village security boxes), households and agricultural lands such as paddy fields and rubber plantations. Safe spaces for women in the Southern Border Provinces not only increases personal security but allows women to increase freedom of movement that leads to economic security.

In addition, strengthening the role of women, marginalized populations, and community-based organisations as peace-builders, and promoting understanding within and between multicultural communities is vital. With this in mind, conflict-affected female-headed households and their families will benefit from local economy and sustainable livelihood options.

In this regard, UN Women will support the national action plan on women, peace and security and the drafting of policy recommendations on "Safe Space for Women in the Southern Border Provinces" building on local initiative of PAW and calling relevant parties to provide the "Safe Spaces" for women and other civilians. The policy recommendations will be submitted to the Sub-committee on Women, Peace and Security to incorporate in the draft Measure and Guideline on Women, Peace and Security.