

Diplomacy Training Program

January 1995 session - Bangkok

Summary

The sixth DTP January session was held at Thammasat University, Bangkok between January 9 and February 3, 1995. 28 participants from 13 countries for the four week session, as well as 14 participants from Thailand who attended the first week only, as an Introductory course, attended and completed the session. 50% of the participants were women. English language was used throughout.

The session was very well received by the participants and workshop convenors alike. All 28 participants received certificates of satisfactory completion from Thammasat University and University of NSW.

The Participants

The 28 participants in the 4 week session, represented 13 countries: Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, East Timor, Australia, Bougainville Island, New Caledonia, Tahiti, Philippines. 50% were women. All were from NGOs active in the field of human rights.

In week 1 there were an additional 14 Thai participants, taking week 1 as an Introduction to International Human Rights course. The teaching program had been adapted for this innovation, a process begun in previous years. These participants required immediate translation which was organised and funded by the Thai NGOs.

Of the 28 the largest single group came from Burma (8) representing the following minorities: Arakan, Karen, Mon, Shan. While techni-

cally illegal in Thailand the Burmese were able to attend the course after lengthy negotiations with the Thai Foreign Ministry. In this process the major burden was born by the host Thai NGOs and Thammasat University.

The issues of most concern to participants varied enormously - from child rights to self-determination, from trafficking in women to indigenous peoples' rights.

The host NGOs

These included: Forum Asia, Asian Cultural Forum on Development, Foundation for Women, Union of Civil Liberty and Prateep Foundation. Local coordinator was Ms Chalida Tajaroensuk, administrative assistant for Forum Asia (and a former DTP graduate). Asia Foundation gave financial support to Thai NGOs for translation in week 1.

Thammasat University

Essential support at Thammasat University came through Professor Chaiwat Satah-Anand, Vice Rector, and Dr. Pontheo Vorakitpokatorn, Director of Academic Studies. Also involved was the Centre for Peace Studies which seconded a staff member for administrative arrangements.

The session was held at the Japanese Studies Centre, Rangsit campus of Thammasat University, located on the outskirts of Bangkok. This facility was first class.

The Thai Parliament

Senior representatives of two committees of the Thai parliament attended and spoke at the opening and closing ceremonies - the Subcommittee on Human Rights and Justice; and the Foreign Affairs Committee.

The presence of parliamentarians with an interest in human rights has become a significant occurrence at Thai NGO conferences in recent times. When the SEANET conference (July 1994) was threatened with closure by the Foreign Minister it was the Human Rights Sub-

Committee of the parliament which came to the rescue by officially opening that conference, despite the intimidating presence of many security personnel. In a similar manner the presence at both DTP ceremonies of parliamentarians was a gesture of support for NGO involvement in human rights and for DTP in particular.

Following concerns expressed by the Thai Foreign Ministry (prior to the session's commencement) DTP decided not to bring Jose Ramos-Horta to Bangkok and to replace him in the teaching program with other experts. This did not detract from the teaching program.

The Teaching Program

DTP's teaching uses small group exercises and role plays in equal measure with presentations and discussion. While some topics require direct imparting of information and concepts which can only effectively be done through presentation there are many parts of the program which are developed through workshoping technique. Major conceptual topics are always followed directly by a workshop which enables the participants to learn through experience.

DTP prefers to have a main convenor present for each week of the session, specialising in one section of the program. This enables development of trust, for participants to get used to the convenor's style, language and philosophy.

DTP's Executive Officer, John Scott-Murphy was present throughout the session, teaching specific topics and ensuring continuity of input and that participants individual issues were addressed.

Week 1

Main convenor: Cecilia Jimenez

Essential concepts of human rights

Human rights law, Public international law

The United nations system

Cultural relativism and human rights, Universality and indivisibility of human rights

The right of self-determination, NGO human rights work

Women's human rights

Field trip to UN building, Bangkok

Week 2

Main convenor: D J Ravindran

The Charter based human rights system
The Commission on Human Rights
The Sub-Commission
The Treaty bodies
The International Labour Organisation
NGO activities at the UN
Thematic procedures of the UN
Framing a resolution, Lobbying at the UN
The politics of governments at the UN

Week 3

Main convenors: Rebecca Peters

Foreign policy and human rights
Making a speech to a UN body
Writing a press release
Understanding media bias
Child rights networks
CEDAW and women's rights
Press conferences
Electronic media, Media language

Week 4

Main convenors: Ravi Nair

Environment issues in Thailand
UNCED and UN action on environment
Development and human rights
NGO networks in Asia, NGO strategy development
Refugees and refugee law
Asia-Pacific governments and human rights
Cultural relativism and government policies

Skills development

The development of skills - in oral presentation, in writing, use of human rights language, factual and legal argument, as well as analysis of situations and the development of strategies - was a constant theme throughout the session. All convenors approach their subject from a practical perspective and can teach from their own experience.

Language is a major constraint as participants usually have English as their third or fourth language and are not as confident in it as they would like to be. Every effort is made to assist participants to understand and use the language of human rights in English, which contains many technical terms but is also a conceptual tool.

Workshop Convenors

Main convenors

Cecilia Jimenez (International Affairs Officer, Philippines Alliance of Human Rights Advocates) - Week 1

John Scott-Murphy (Executive Officer, DTP) - Weeks 1,2,3,4

D J Ravindran (consultant to Forum Asia) - Week 2

Rebecca Peters (journalist and human rights activist) - Week 3

Ravi Nair (South Asia Human Rights Doc. Centre) - Week 4

Guest convenors

Malee Pruekongsawalee (lecturer in law, Thammasat University - Women's human rights, CEDAW)

Jose Campino (UN Secretariat, New York) - UN system

Mayan Villaba (Asian Migrant Centre) - migrant workers

Amihan Abueva (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism) - child exploitation

Prof. Chaiwat Satha-Anand (Vice Rector, Thammasat University) - non-violent action

Roque Raymundo (Jesuit Refugee Service) - refugees and refugee law

Dr Kumalin (Law Faculty, Chulalongkorn University) - Convention on the Rights of the Child

Tueenjai Deetes (Hill Tribes Foundation) - environment

Evaluation

Evaluation was by anonymous questionnaire and through class discussion. The participants responded very positively and despite the long hours and intense nature of the course many would have preferred a longer time span. A few found the course too long.

Comments were sought on each workshop convenor and no significant problems emerged. Many requested less lecture style teaching and increased exercise and role play time. However there was also a significant group who required more lecture time.

In general participants found the course practical, enjoyable and stimulating. The Manual was well received in style and content.

Sponsors

The following organisations sponsored individuals to attend this session:

Community Aid Abroad (3)

Comite Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Developpment (2)

National Council of Churches in Australia (2)

Diakonisches Werk der EKD - Germany) (7)

ICCO - Netherlands (1)

Centre for the Study of Human Rights - Colombo University (1)

Social Justice Unit, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Australia (1)

In addition many organisations contributed to their own participants' airfares.

Location

Holding the session in Bangkok, while having a similar direct cost to the Sydney-based sessions, cost far less in terms of travel for the participants and was consequently more accessible. This may be one reason why more women were able to attend this year.

Despite early concerns expressed by the Thai Foreign Ministry it now appears that DTP is well accepted by the Thai government. Some approaches were made for DTP to create a course for government officials - to date no decision has been made on this.