

PRESS RELEASE

Religious Leaders from the ASEAN Region Visit Conflict Zone in South Thailand and Form an ASEAN Region Multi-religious Network



Photo: Supreme Cambodian Patriarch Tep Vong [an RfP Co-President] together with a Senior Islamic Leader in conflict zone of Southern Thailand

(Bangkok and Pattani, Thailand | September 19, 2012)

More than 200 religious leaders, representatives of interreligious councils and peace scholars from the Association of South Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states, convened in Bangkok and Pattani, Thailand on 17-19 September 2012, to address the role of religion and interreligious cooperation in resolving conflicts and building peace in the ASEAN region.

The conference was organized by the *Religions for Peace* Interreligious Council of Thailand in cooperation with the Muslim World League (MWL); Thai government's Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC); Office of Shaikhul Islam; Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University; Assalam Institute; Yala Islamic University and *Religions for Peace* International.

The participants committed themselves to establishing and/or strengthening national interreligious mechanisms in respective countries and to developing a network of Inter-religious Councils in ASEAN to further strengthen interreligious actions to prevent conflicts, promote development, and advance peace in ASEAN countries and the region as a whole.

The participants also visited the southern Thailand where Buddhist and Muslim communities and the *Religions for Peace* Interreligious Council of Thailand have been working to build closer relationships among various religious groups to apply religious principles and practices to resolve conflicts in the South. The visit to Southern Thailand further strengthened the religious leaders' commitment to action-oriented interreligious cooperation for conflict transformation and peacebuilding.



Photos: (1) RfP International Secretary-General Dr. Vendley with Thai Prime Minister Shinawatra; (2) ASEAN Interreligious Forum in Bangkok

Her Excellency Prime Minister Mrs. Yinglak Shinawatra of Thailand welcomed the *Religions for Peace* and Muslim World League delegation at her official residence and stated in her statement to the conference that “through deeper cooperation among ASEAN religious leaders, a peaceful ASEAN community will become a reality.”

Prof. Dr. Din Syamusuddin, Moderator of Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace*, stressed that “our ASEAN region is faced with new, urgent and decisive threats to peace that cut across the boundaries of each particular religious community. Action that combines compassion, justice and forgiveness must be urgently taken by all of us. So it is that our multi-religious cooperation can become an alliance of great spiritual and moral strength to uphold the dignity of every person and the well-being of our common earth.”

The ASEAN Social and Cultural Community (ASCC), one of the pillars of the ASEAN Community, will be officially launched in the year 2015. This new platform will pave the way for a more dynamic people-to-people, including religious groups, exchange among ASEAN member states.

Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* International, stated that cooperation between multi-religious bodies and ASEAN could yield great fruit in terms of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region. He also noted that “religious communities and governments have different identities, mandates and capacities. Cooperation between them should respect these differences.”

Religions for Peace

Speakers included **H.E. Prof. Dr. Abdullah Muhsin Al-Turky**, Secretary General, The Muslim World League; **Dr. William F. Vendley**, Secretary General of the World Conference of *Religions for Peace*; **Somdej Phramaharajmangklajarn**, Committee Sangha Council; **H.E. Yongyut Wichaidis**, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand; **Prof. Dr. Din Syamsuddin**, President, Muhammadiyah, *Religions for Peace* International Co-President; Moderator, Asian Conference of *Religions for Peace*; **His Holiness Ven. Tep Vong**, Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia; *Religions for Peace* **Dr. Ismail Lutfi Japakiya**, Co-President, *Religions for Peace* Inter-religious Council of Thailand; **Dr. Parichart Suwanbubbha**, Secretary to the *Religions for Peace* Interreligious Council of Thailand; **Phrarajwarajarn** Co President *Religions for Peace* Inter-religious Council of Thailand; **Dr. Gothom Arya**, Senior Advisor to the Council; **Dr. Lillian Sison**, Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* Philippines; Chair, Asian Women of Faith Network; Dean, Graduate School, Pontifical University of Santo Tomas; **Mr. U Myint Swe**, President, Ratana Metta and Acting President of *Religions for Peace* Myanmar, Myanmar; and **Rev. Kyoichi Sugino**, Deputy Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* International.

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