

Remarks by
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On the Current Situation in Thailand
Naradhip Auditorium, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
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Colleagues from foreign media agencies,

I am here today to present the latest developments regarding the political situation in Thailand. We have senior representatives from the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) with us; and here with me is Lieutenant General Chatchalerm Chalermsook, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Royal Thai Army, who will be happy to answer your questions afterwards.

Let us start with the most important part – the rationale behind the actions of the NCPO.

During the last 9 years, the world has seen the Thai society become more and more divisive. Different groups have been confronting one another with their fixed ideals, culminating in the increasing political turmoil during the last 6 months. Entrenched positions and irreconcilable differences have led to escalating violence – nearly 30 innocent lives have been lost and more than 700 people injured. Public and private properties have been destroyed and governmental buildings were taken over.

Previous administrations had declared the Emergency Decree and Internal Security Act, while security forces were mobilized to calm the situation. Furthermore, Martial Law was declared for the first time on 20th May 2014 in order to provide a calmer environment for all parties to come together for consultations to find possible ways out of the political impasse.

However, these efforts came to no avail.

As you are all aware, **the prolonged political deadlock and the administrative paralysis have been devastating to Thailand.** Losses of income from tourism compounded by a fiscal vacuum put strains on Thailand's GDP, which became negative for the first time in many years in the 2nd quarter of 2014. Normal daily lives were disrupted by rallies and demonstrations, while government agencies were unable to perform their duties effectively.

The action taken by the National Council for Peace and Order should therefore be **viewed in the above context of prevailing 6 months of political turmoil. Had Thailand continued on the path we were heading, it would have led to more instability, protracted conflicts and divisiveness.** Furthermore, it would have undermined the effectiveness of the ASEAN community and its economy.

Given the situation, the military was **compelled to take control** of national administration in order to **provide a cooling-off period** for all sides, and to prevent further deterioration of the situation. The NCPO's invocation of Martial Law is indeed intended **to prevent further violence, restore stability, and put the country back on track towards full democracy.**

With regard to that goal, **the NCPO reaffirms that individual rights and freedoms are to be upheld.** The limitations that have been put in place are only those necessary to prevent further disruption and pre-empt efforts to instigate violent incidents.

On 26th May the Head of the NCPO has been appointed officially by Royal Promulgation. This act is part of the customary tradition for Thailand's constitutional monarch to appoint all administrative body of the country in this way.

Now let me summarize latest development of the situation since then.

Freedom of Media

Regarding the media, both foreign and domestic journalists have been able to travel around to cover stories and provide accurate reporting. Representatives of all television channels have been called in for consultations with the NCPO to work towards the resumption of all normal broadcasting. In fact, as tension eases, most terrestrial, satellite and cable television and radio stations have been able to resume their normal broadcasting. All 6 Free TV channels have fully returned to their regular schedule.

Steps are also being taken for other media to resume their normal operation. Residents of Thailand still enjoy full access to social media outlets such as LINE and Facebook. It is not the policy of the NCPO to close down any social media including Facebook. However, specific sites which instigate hatred and disseminate false information have been asked for their cooperation in refraining from further incitement.

Application of Martial Law

Regarding the imposition of Martial Law and curfew, they are intended to restore law and order, and prevent further untoward incidents. Above all, **the Council is exercising its administrative power with utmost care. So far, only 2 out of 16 provisions from the Martial Law Act B.E. 2457 (1914) have been applied to restore peace and order.** Soldiers have been allowed to carry their weapons only for self-defense. All security personnel have also been briefed on the rules of engagement which are in line with the international standards.

Since 22nd May, security forces have been able to seize large quantities of military-grade weapons and explosive devices from different quarters. All protesters have been facilitated to return home. **No more innocent lives have been lost, and normal life has resumed for the general public** – just in time for the start of the new school year for most pupils. For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, our Consular Department at Changwattana Road will resume its full range of services from Monday 2nd June onwards.

Although the curfew has been in place to ensure public order and safety, its **duration has been shortened to only 4 hours** each day between midnight and 4 o'clock in the morning. **In order to mitigate negative impact on normal activities, exceptions have been made for international travelers** entering or leaving Thailand, employees in industries that require shift work, those employed in the transportation of perishable goods, and those with extreme necessities such as hospital patients and officials performing humanitarian duties. In fact, great efforts have been made to minimize disruption to normal life as much as possible – those with emergency needs can also ask for permission to travel from military officials on duty in their respective area.

Summons of political leaders

Regarding the so-called “detention” of those summoned by the NCPO, a number of core leaders have been brought together in the hope to reduce further incitement of divisions. They have been well treated and accommodated in guest quarters. **Their movements have been restricted in order to provide for a cooling-off period. They are able to return home within 7 days from the date they report themselves to the NCPO.** So far, no one has been kept away for longer than 5 days. As of today, many of them have already been able to return home.

Those who face criminal charges during the invocation of the Emergency Decree and the Internal Security Act will undergo due judicial process.

Former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra was invited to report herself to the Council on 23rd May 2014 and has already returned home within a couple of hours on that day.

NCPO's envisaged steps for the future

National Administration

The priority of the NCPO is to **ensure that national administration functions as normal and key policies can be implemented.** Civil servants have been assigned to resume their normal administrative functions, with the Permanent Secretaries of all Ministries appointed to act in the capacity of Ministers. Furthermore, to enhance effectiveness of policy formulation, prominent technocrats from a wide range of professions have been appointed as advisors to the NCPO.

To promote social stability, projects related to the livelihood and well-being of people are given special priority. The disbursement of next year's fiscal budget, due to start on 1st October 2014, will be expedited. A budget of 92,431 million baht (2,835 million USD) has been approved to pay to all remaining participants of the rice-pledging scheme by the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives in order to relieve the hardship faced by these farmers. The NCPO has also pledged to formulate practical and responsible economic policies to promote economic growth in a sustainable manner.

Commitments to the international community

The NCPO has pledged to protect all diplomatic missions, consulates, international organizations, as well as all tourists and foreign nationals residing in Thailand. **The Council has reaffirmed that all diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Thailand and foreign nations remain unchanged from their status under the previous government.** All on-going negotiations will also be carried out as planned. Thailand's commitment under various international obligations will be respected.

The Council will continue to take various initiatives to explain Thailand's situation to the international community. Thailand looks to foreign media's cooperation in sending truthful messages about Thailand to

the world. **Given the interconnection of our globalized world, no country can take an isolationistic approach any more – and Thailand is no exception.** Thailand intends to continue our proactive foreign policy, especially in ASEAN, the United Nations and other multilateral fora. **The Council is working towards returning the situation to normalcy as soon as possible so that Thailand can return to proactive and mutually beneficial relationships with our international friends and partners.**

Way forward towards the general elections

It is the Council's intention to **create the right conditions for national reconciliation and push forward the reform process**, in order to put Thailand on a path towards free and fair elections and restore democracy once again. Some of the key initiatives are:

- National Reconciliation Centre will be created for people from all walks of life from community level upwards. It will be co-lead by the Governors of respective provinces, and will provide a place for people to discuss their ideas and find solutions to their differences.

- There will be reforms of the civil service, with a special emphasis on good governance throughout all agencies without interference from politicians.

The Council therefore asks for an understanding and patience from the international community in allowing time for effective administration and social harmony to be restored to Thailand. The Council has pledged to return the situation to normal as soon as possible, and to ensure long term stability for both Thailand and the region.

Last, but not least, it should always be emphasized that the Monarchy is non-partisan and is therefore not involved in, and always remain above, politics.

Thank you very much for your attention. The floor is now open for questions.

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