



OPEN LETTER

To: **H.E. Mr. Chuan Leekpai, President of the National Assembly of Thailand and Speaker of the Thai House of Representatives**

Re: **Reconciliation Committee**

Bangkok, 16 November 2020

APPEAL TO UNITE FORCES TOWARDS RECONCILIATION IN THAILAND

Your Excellency Mr. Chuan Leekpai,

In support of your laudable efforts to set up an effective Thailand Reconciliation Committee, we would like to offer some of our views and submit recommendations.

Assessment

Reconciliation efforts are extremely urgent as over a hundred students and activists have been arrested in recent weeks and days in Thailand, solely for exercising their constitutional rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and political participation. These rights are recognised by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which Thailand ratified in 1996, and reaffirmed in its 2017 Constitution.

Students and youth leaders, who are all citizens of Thailand and who love their country have been unlawfully arrested and sometimes arrested again and re-arrested, and have been exposed to disproportionate treatments and conditions severely **posing risks to affecting their physical and mental health, and their spiritual integrity.**

Accusations of sedition and worse crimes are not appropriate in a situation where global citizens act peacefully out of civic responsibility. These accusations cause the deepening of the conflict and enforcement of injustice the protesters actually address.

This is how our partners in Thailand assess the situation.

Reconciliation

After a two-day special session, October 26-27 2020, the Thai Parliament failed to reach an agreement on how to end the crisis. Nevertheless it was announced that Your Excellency, Speaker of the Thai House of Representative, proposed to establish a **Reconciliation**

Committee to restore national harmony and end the current conflict. Former Prime Ministers of Thailand and advisors have been consulted by now.

We as signatories to this Appeal, Laureates of the Right Livelihood Award, out of our diverse and seasoned experiences with conflict transformation and social innovation worldwide, would like to humbly offer our opinions and submit some recommendations.

Right Livelihood Award

The [Right Livelihood Award](#) – also known as “the Alternative Nobel Prize” – recognises since 1980 **persons and organisations which, often in the most difficult circumstances, demonstrate positive solutions to problems affecting peoples’ rights and health, the environment and food systems, security from violence and oppression, reconciliation as well as human creativity to forge social transformation.**

A world community driven by Right Livelihood is a vision shared by the Laureates.

The [Right Livelihood College](#) (RLC) provides **a platform for transfer and sharing of knowledge, inspiration and experience gained by the Laureates.** [RLC Bangkok campus](#) is an independent organisation under the Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation and works together with Chulalongkorn University and partners.

Analysis

1. **The conflicts in Thailand are unique** on the one hand, but on the other hand **in essence they are shared regionally and globally.** They point at the need for urgent transformation towards genuine sustainability, climate balance, justice and cultural integrity at local, national, eco-system and global levels. What we all share is our sacred obligation to leave a better world for future generations.
2. **Young people worldwide experience the pains of the challenges of our time first-line and should be facilitated to take responsibility especially where older generations have failed.**
3. Students face these challenges most fundamentally in the education system where increasingly the space for free expression by students and independent academics – as well as the exploration of alternative world views – has been restricted and curtailed by vested interests. In the public space it has become more and more difficult to setting up and supporting new political parties and organisations.
4. **Young people today are subject to obstruction from redundant regulations, unfair political structures and traditional institutions that do not live up to their missions.**
5. This overwhelming complexity of factors results in depletion of morale, compensation in overconsumption, deterioration of the environment, undermining of democratic values, coercive education systems, economic inequality and insecurity, discrimination of minorities – in particular indigenous peoples – and exploitation of labour. **Student activists try to break through this cycle and their efforts should be seen as important contributions to local and global Peace building.**

Solutions and recommendations

If Thailand can find – thanks to its Youth – a pathway to solutions in this situation threatening Human Security, it will be widely appreciated as a sign of hope for the whole world! Young people and diversity are central in this endeavor.

Therefore, in consultation with our partners in Thailand and from our multiple experiences – from both local and international perspectives – we recommend to distinguish:

- a. **Immediate pre-conditions towards reconciliation**
- b. **Rules of the game that provide security and build trust during the reconciliation process**
- c. **Long term conditions for permanent dialogue, innovative learning processes and platforms for collaborative action towards social transformation.**

a.1. Immediate and unconditional acquittal of all students and youth leaders who have been indicted in the context of the peaceful exercise of their rights – although they may have made mistakes – is a basic precondition for any serious attempt towards dialogue and reconciliation.

a.2. It is important to admit failure where *reconciliation was already promised* as rationale of the coup d'état in 2014. **Now that another “Reconciliation Committee” has been proposed by Your Excellency, Speaker of the Thai Parliament, six years later, proof is evident of this failure.** The political leadership – with due respect – should take responsibility, and as customary in the context of good governance, resign to give way to open dialogue and new solutions for the future.

b.1. It is essential for building trust that **a clear commitment will be made that no indictments or arrests shall be made with regards to opinions expressed and actions taken during the process of dialogue and reconciliation.**

b.2. We have now learned that a general agreement exists, among Thai politicians, including arguably the Prime Minister, regarding the necessity to amend the 2017 Constitution. This being so, though it was presented to Thai citizens as one that would be *valid on a longer term than any earlier constitution*. **The student protestors and many young citizens expect a “People’s Constitution” rather than one confirming economic and political inequality.** Creative interim measurements should be agreed upon to pave the way forward to **a truly participatory Constitution Drafting Committee. Open Dialogue in the public space will be a requirement for progress.**

b.3. The **King Prajadhipok's Institute (KPI)**, as an esteemed academic institute assigned to preparing the Reconciliation Committee, is advised to include in their supporting research and recommendations – while respecting Section 1 and 2 of the Constitution – an **open dialogue on all sections of the 2017 Constitution**, including Sections 5, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 182 which were unilaterally changed after the 2017 citizens’ referendum had been concluded and confirmed by the Constitutional Court (<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1228183/six-sections-changed-in-constitution>)

c.1. Common ground should be carefully explored among all stakeholders on paving the way for genuine democracy, social innovation towards ensuring Human Security, environmental restoration and the wellbeing of future generations.

c.2. *Wasting money* – in an era of COVID-19 crisis with enormous economic implications – by **subduing young talent and creativity through expensive judicial procedures, burdening police forces and the maintenance of overloaded prisons is not a rational choice.** Investments should be prioritized towards support systems enabling young academics, independent political scientists and sincere lawyers, youth and civil society leaders, progressive business leaders, social entrepreneurs, as well as health and food providers to **perform the services they are eager to provide to the people-in-need of the country they love.** Young talents are urgently in demand to restore the economy, including tourism, by **casting a positive message about Thailand's capacity for just and fair self-organisation, resilience and regeneration of its rural and urban culture.**

Right Livelihood College

As everywhere in the world, we as **Right Livelihood Award (RLA) Laureates** with the **Right Livelihood College campuses** and **student groups** are ready to join hands with all people of good will **who stand for Human Rights, social justice and cultural integrity.**

Common efforts towards Reconciliation and Peace building could be shaped as a meaningful, inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral learning and teaching programme – serving as a “policy lab” – to which we, the under-signed, would be happy to contribute if the above mentioned conditions are met.

Your Excellency,

We will with due respect monitor the situation in Thailand from an international perspective, as Thailand is a respected member of the international community. Many students and Youth leaders from abroad are closely connected with friends in Thailand and they are dedicated to support their colleagues.

Let us unite in spirit across cultures, boundaries and nations, while sharing our dedication to co-creating a better world for all humanity and the community of life.

We will appreciate Your response to this Open Letter. We trust You will be willing to clarify **how the Reconciliation Committee will reach out to the student-protesters and the broader reform movement.**

Sincerely Yours,



Hans van Willenswaard



Wallapa van Willenswaard

Right Livelihood College and partners

Wallapa and Hans van Willenswaard, Thailand / the Netherlands

Right Livelihood College campus Bangkok / School for Wellbeing Studies and Research;
organisers of the annual Chulalongkorn University Right Livelihood Summerschool (CURLS)

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In particular SUPPORTED BY:

Right Livelihood Award (RLA) Laureates:

Sulak Sivaraksa, Thailand

Honorary Doctor of Philosophy, Thammasat University, Thailand

Founder, Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation and Wongsanit Ashram, an alternative learning center; Co-Founder, International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB); recipient of the Niwano Peace Award, Japan

RLA 1995

Dato' **Anwar Fazal**, Malaysia

Director / Founder, Right Livelihood College; former President Consumers International (CI, formerly IOCU); Founder, Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), and Pesticide Action Network (PAN)

RLA 1982

Prof. Dr. **Raul Montenegro**, Biologist, Argentina.

Director, Campus Cordoba of the Right Livelihood College (RLC), Faculty of Psychology, National University of Cordoba, Argentina. Founder of FUNAM, a grassroots organisation and member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

RLA 2004

Helen Mack Chang, Guatemala

Business administrator; supporter of low-income housing and not-for-profit education. After the assassination of her sister she founded, at great personal risk, the Myrna Mack Foundation for countering impunity and the protection of human rights

RLA 1992

P K Ravindran, India

Kerala Sastra Sahitya Pasishad (KSSP), movement for the mass dissemination of science in Kerala and local languages worldwide

RLA 1996

Sima Samar, Afghanistan

Doctor for the poor, educator of the marginalised and defender of the human rights of all in Afghanistan. Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission that holds human rights violators accountable, a commitment that has put her own life at great risk.

RLA 2012

Paul Walker, USA

Campaigner against chemical weapons; Director, Legacy of the Cold War Program, with Global Green USA, the US affiliate of Green Cross International (GCI), set up by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993. This program was later renamed the Environmental Security and Sustainability Program.

RLA 2013

Nnimmo Bassey, Nigeria

Founder, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF); former Chair, Friends of the Earth International. He was one of *Time magazine's* Heroes of the Environment in 2009. Coordinator Right Livelihood College campus Port Harcourt.

RLA 2010

Maude Barlow, Canada

High-profile leader in the women's movement in Canada and globally. She founded the Council of Canadians, Canada's largest citizens' advocacy organisation, which works to safeguard Canada's universal social security system, its water and energy heritage and the international search for a more just and sustainable trade system. Maude Barlow also serves on the Executive Committee of the Global Alliance for the Right of Nature (GARN); and is a Member of the *World Future Council*. She was the leader in an international campaign for a United Nations Convention on the Right to Water.

RLA 2005

Alyn Ware, New Zealand / Aotearoa

Peace educator and nuclear disarmament consultant. Coordinator of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament; Director of the Basel Peace Office; Coordinator of the World Future Council Peace & Disarmament Program; International Representative for the NZ Peace Foundation (Te Tuapapa Rongomau o Aotearoa)

RLA 2009

Friday 13 November, a global public **Students' Dialogue on the current protests in Thailand** was organized (online) by the Right Livelihood College Global Secretariat, RLC campus Bonn, Germany, and the Right Livelihood Foundation, Office Geneva, Switzerland. Students from Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University and Thammasat University, all in Bangkok, participated in a dialogue moderated by *Advisor* Right Livelihood College and lecturer, Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University.