



## PRESS RELEASE

### **“Dignity and Justice for All of Us: Our Voices are Heard in Thailand”**

#### **United Nations and National Human Rights Commission of Thailand Engage Public in Dialogue on Fundamental Rights Enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

**Bangkok, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2008** – A workshop entitled “Peoples’ Rights in the Universal Declaration - Commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Thailand” was held at the Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok.

The event hosted jointly by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the United Nations System in Thailand was the final consultative workshop organised to develop a publication entitled: *“Dignity and Justice for All of Us: Our Voices are Heard in Thailand”*. The publication is being produced to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year and to take stock of the progress made in the country.

Two previous workshops were held in Khon Kaen and Songkhla to learn how people in the north-east and south of the country relate to the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the positive developments since 1948 in terms of realizing these rights for them, as well as the challenges they may be facing. Individual testimonies and voices have also been collected through interviews in diverse parts of the country, from people from all walks of life. The Bangkok workshop provided a platform to discuss the voices collected from the different regions and consolidate them in preparation for the publication’s launch on 9<sup>th</sup> December.

In the final publication, each article in the Declaration will feature an analysis of comments collected from individuals for whom articles have particular relevance, as well as the significance of respective articles in the Thai context. The evolution of rights related to the Declaration within this context will also be discussed and a series of constructive recommendations developed for consideration by the relevant authorities.

In his welcoming remarks, Mr. Weerawit Weeraworawit, Deputy Secretary General of the NHRC of Thailand said: “Thailand has made continuous progress in the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular in the fields of the right to health and the right to environment. But there are still many voices of grievances that have to be heard. There are areas where there is still room for improvement. Of particular concern is the implementation of public policies, such as the policy to combat drug trafficking, which were hastily and drastically implemented without due process of law and respect of basic human rights. The grievances of the rural communities have been heard more in recent years as the 1997 Thailand Constitution recognized community rights which respect the traditional way of life of people in rural areas. These community rights have been further strengthened by the 2007 Constitution. The focus

on community rights has taken place in an environment where a strong emphasis on economic growth has adversely affected the rights of local communities. As such, the publication will reflect the evolution of both aspects - the rights of individuals and the rights of communities – and will have a positive impact on the human rights situation in the country.”

“As the people of the United Nations, this anniversary is an opportunity for us all to restate our commitments as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, said Gwi-yeop Son, UN Resident Coordinator in Thailand. “There is no denying that Thailand has achieved a great deal since 1948, when it was among the first Asian countries to adopt the Declaration. This 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate achievements and address new opportunities. With this in mind, *Dignity and Justice for All of Us: Our Voices are Heard in Thailand* is a publication that will have both retrospective and forward-thinking dimensions, with a view to setting a clear agenda for the future enjoyment of human rights by all throughout the country.”

Ms. Son went on to highlight the significance of the date of the workshop, which is being held during the week designated by the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as *Dignity and Justice for Detainees Week*, as part of a series of events to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On this day the United Nations is calling on all to pay special attention to the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons deprived of their liberty in prisons and other places of detention.

Professor Saneh Chamarik, Chairperson of the NHRC of Thailand, talked about the global evolution of human rights. He said: “The UDHR was adopted at the end of the Second World War, as a result of the oppression that occurred during previous years. Society was inspired to address human rights so that people could live peacefully and respect each other. Under various circumstances after the war, the concept and practices of human rights spread throughout the world, encompassing a large variety of human rights such as the right to self-determination, as well as civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.”

Professor Saneh Chamarik went on to remind participants that a vital characteristic of human rights is their “universal, interrelated and indivisible nature”. “It is the obligation of all stakeholders to pay due respect to the human rights of all peoples”, he said.

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