

# **Seminar “Empowering Women for Peace Building”**

**Organized by  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung**

**2-4 December 2005  
BP Samila Hotel, Muang, Songkhla, Thailand**

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## **Background**

The violent conflict in the three Muslim provinces in the South of Thailand, which escalated since the beginning of 2004 is a major concern of women community leaders and councillors because women are economically and socially affected in a serious way.

During the seminar “Women’s Role and Socio-economic Change”, the most important issues addressed by southern women were the distrust among different groups of people, human security, unemployment of youth, drug addiction, etc. The participants suggested that in response to the ongoing problems, economic and social development at community level should be strengthened so that the community can adjust itself and deal with changes. Women, whose traditional role in Thai society is to take care of their families, are competent leaders for such development. However, they need to develop their knowledge and skills in order to better deal with the causes and impact of violence.

Dialogue has been widely known as a tool to improve understanding among different groups in many conflict areas. In Thailand, this is a new approach developed recently and the concept is particularly not known among women. Therefore, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung organized a training workshop on women and dialogue skills in early December 2005. Muslim and Buddhist women from the south who are community leaders, local councillors, teachers, civil servants, and university lecturers met with the aim to learn more about this concept, its rules, and to practise with each other.

## **Aims**

1. Building an understanding of dialogue skills with women community leaders.
2. Providing dialogue training for women on various topics.
3. Encouraging participants to use dialogue skills for community development and peace.
4. Stimulating good understanding between participants from different religions.

## **Main content of the training**

The team of facilitators led by Dr. Parichart Suwanbubpha from the Peace Studies Centre, Mahidol University, used participatory techniques in conducting the training for about 30 participants. At the beginning, participants acquainted themselves with others, asking and answering questions and exchanging ideas through games and small group discussions. Through open-minded discussion and attentive listening participants perceived better understanding and removed prejudices against each other.

What is dialogue?

Dialogue is a communication technique which concentrates on sharing of different experiences in order to learn and understand stories from another point of view. Dialogue is widely accepted as an effective method for building good understanding and helping create a strong foundation for further relations between people from different groups. It also means gaining a deeper understanding by attentive listening, which in turn leads to more objectivity.

Different identities make society beautiful and lively. However, when prejudices or misunderstandings occur, one's identity might be the cause of the problem and separate that person from the others. It is most common that everyone tends to think, act and say that their language, culture and belief are the best and most correct. Therefore, it is useless to argue.

How should we behave in a pluralist society?

1. One should treat others as one wishes to be treated.
2. One should not treat others as one does not wish to be treated.

As global Ethic says:

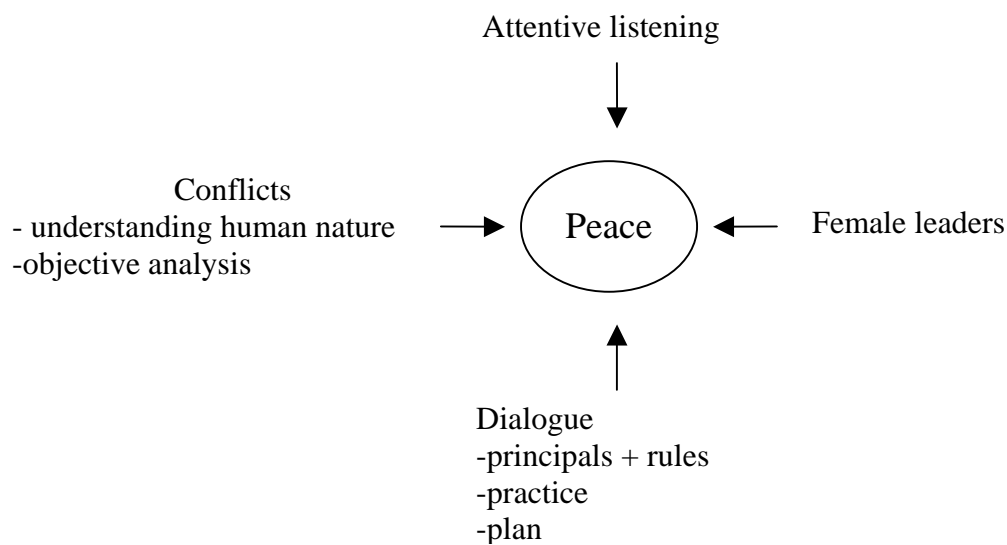
1. Respect all lives.
2. Treat others honestly and fairly.
3. Think, act and speak truthfully.
4. Respect and love one another.

There are rules in conducting a dialogue, which participants need to follow: no hidden agenda, interaction with each other as human beings, equality, to reveal ones' standpoint and to be open to comments from others, to not use ones' belief to judge the others, to be open minded, honest and sincere, to trust the others, to not merge the principle with the practise, and to be aware that dialogue can not solve all problems.

The facilitators assigned participants to work in groups and to play certain games together in order to learn about their differences and how to solve some conflicts under these conditions. Views of participants on roles and potentials of women were

also exchanged. Both, Buddhists and Muslims see women as capable and active. The facilitator then drew a diagram of peace building with women as key actors:

Dialogue scheme:



After acquainting themselves with and learning some rules, and after sharing some common experiences together, the training team asked the participants to practise Muslim-Buddhist dialogue by applying the rules learnt. They were divided into two groups of Muslims and Buddhists and subsequently prepared questions to ask each other on their views about the violent situation. Some questions asked were about views of Muslims on some recent cases of violence, and how Buddhists view Muslims in this context. Two observers appointed by each group reflected that the following dialogue process was very good, even though the moderators had some difficulties in controlling the process. Later, the participants were asked to design an action plan on how they would use dialogue skills in improving understanding among citizens in their communities.

## Conclusion

The participants were very enthusiastic and cooperated with the facilitators throughout the program. They were satisfied with the seminar and seemed determined to pass on their knowledge and to apply it to work towards more peace at community level.

