iDMC internal displacement monitoring centre

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THAILAND

Buddhist minority declines in the 'deep south' due to protracted armed conflict

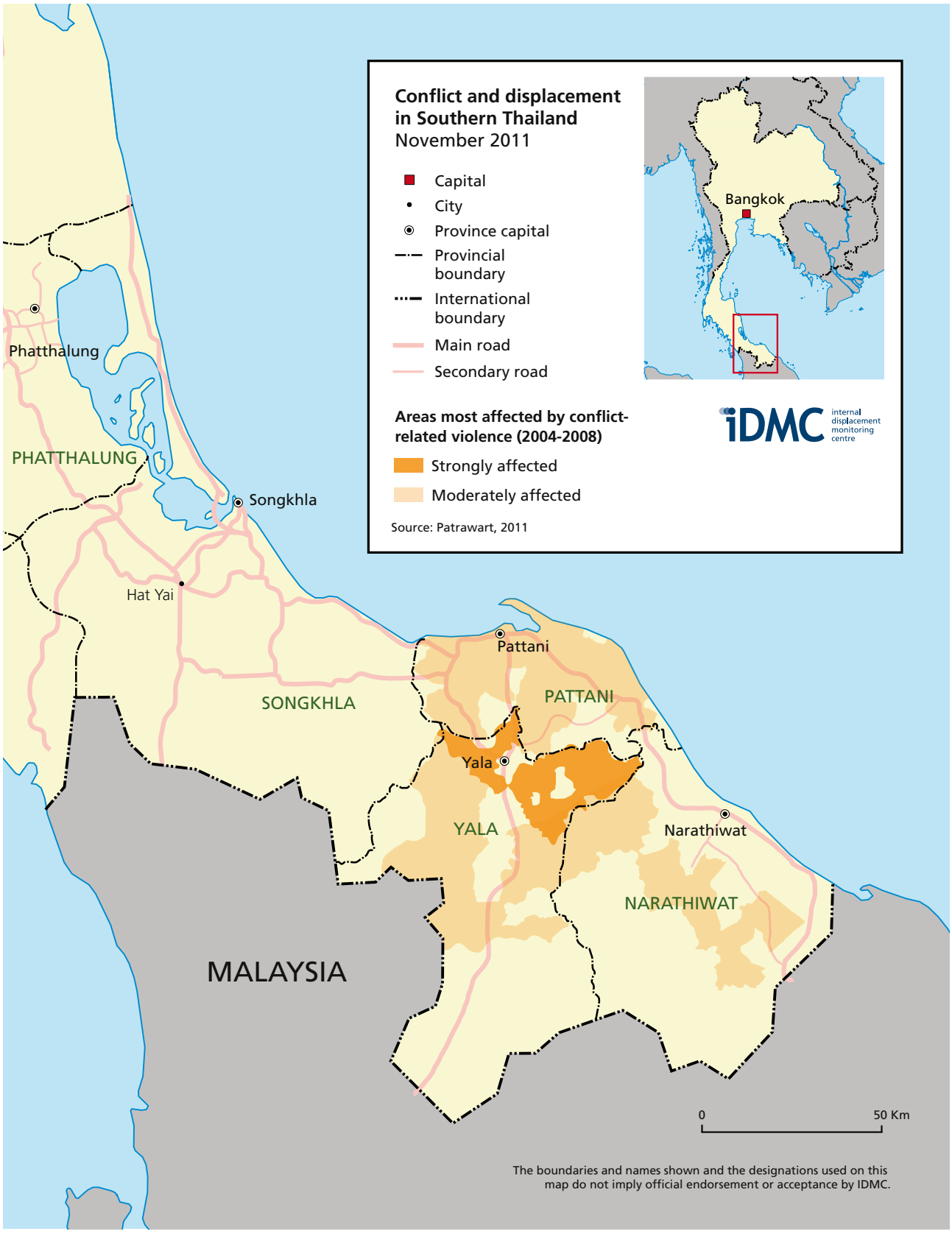
Since 2004, there has been a resurgence of violence in Thailand's southern provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, where the government is facing the violent opposition of a number of Malay Muslim insurgency groups. Close to 5,000 people have been killed and nearly 8,000 injured. Buddhists, estimated to represent around 20 per cent of the total population of the three provinces in 2000, have been disproportionately affected by the violence; they account for nearly 40 per cent of all deaths and more than 60 per cent of all injured. Civilians from both communities are the main victims of the violence. As a result, many have since 2004 fled their homes and moved to safer areas.

There are no reliable figures on the number of people displaced since 2004, but available information suggests that at least 30 per cent of Buddhists and ten per cent of Malay Muslims may have left their homes. While some have fled in direct response to the violence, many have moved because of the adverse effects of the conflict on the economy, on the availability and quality of education or on the provision of social services. Many of the displacements are also intended to be only temporary, and have split families, the head of household staying and the wife and children moving to safer areas.

Buddhist civilians targeted by the insurgents because of their real or perceived association with the Thai state have fled their homes in large numbers, either seeking refuge in nearby urban areas or leaving the three provinces altogether. They include government employees, teachers, doctors, nurses, monks but also peasants and rubber tappers. Malay Muslims have also left their homes, most of them moving to safer areas within the region or crossing into neighbouring Malaysia to seek employment there.

Some people who have been unable or unwilling to flee the violence have joined armed militias. The government, which has since 2004 increasingly relied on paramilitary groups to fight the insurgency, has strongly encouraged civilians to defend the "Thai homeland". It has selectively provided training and arms to Buddhists and also given financial incentives to encourage government employees to stay. While probably stemming the exodus of Buddhists, this policy has resulted in an increased ethno-religious polarisation and has heightened risk of incidents and abuses between both communities.

While those who moved outside the affected provinces have at least managed to reach safe areas and achieve some form of durable solution, the majority of IDPs have moved to urban areas inside the conflict-affected provinces. There, like the rest of the population, they remain at risk of violence from both sides and face challenges in accessing basic social services. Though early in the conflict the government assisted some Buddhists fleeing violence, it has mostly limited its assistance to victims of violence caused by insurgent activities and their families.



Source: IDMC
More maps are available at www.internal-displacement.org

Background

Roots of the armed conflict in Southern Thailand
In recent years, the internal armed conflict in the three southernmost provinces of the country has been the main cause of conflict-induced displacement in the country. Thailand's southern border region, also referred to as the "deep south", was made up of autonomous Muslim sultanates until it was annexed by Thailand (then Siam) in 1902. While the majority of the population of Thailand is Buddhist, the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat have a Muslim, ethnic Malay, majority with its own language, Pattani Malay or Jawi. Government policies have tended to support the Buddhist minority while neglecting the needs of the Malay majority. For example, the government supported the resettlement of Buddhists from other provinces, in particular during the 1960s, providing them with land in the deep south and economic support (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.5, EWC, August 2006, p.9).

Provinces in the deep south suffer from relatively high unemployment, low educational attainment and poor infrastructure, but conflict in the region appears to be rooted in political rather than socio-economic grievances (SIPRI, November 2007, p.18; McCargo & Jitpiromsri, August 2010, p.5). The Thai state has not recognised the specific Malay identity and failed to ensure a fair representation of Malay Muslims in national and regional government. Resistance and separatist activities that have continued in the region for more than a century can be seen as a response to the government's continued failure to politically accommodate the Malay majority and to uphold justice and the rule of law (ICG, 22 June 2009, p.10).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the government managed to drastically reduce insurgency-driven violence by co-opting Malay political and religious elites and proposing socio-economic and security programmes. However, a widespread sense of discrimination remained, as well as specific grievances concerning education, the status of Islamic schools and the local language, and genuine representation of Malays in local and national government (McCargo, 8 January 2008, p.7; SIPRI, November 2007, p.34).

Resurgence of the insurgency since 2001
Levels of violence started increasing in 2001. In 2002, the dissolution by prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra of conflict-management bodies such as the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) and the joint civilian-police-military task force (CPM) weakened the government's capacity to deal with separatist tensions, and 119 "insurgency-driven" incidents were recorded in 2003 (SIPRI, November 2007, p.30). That year, the government conducted an anti-drug campaign in the country which resulted in the killing of nearly 2,600 people (ICG, 18 May 2005, pp.35-36). In the deep south, this campaign was accompanied by reports of widespread human rights abuses by police officers, including extra-judicial killings and the use of "blacklists", creating a climate of fear and resentment among the population (HRW, August 2007, pp. 29-30).

In 2004 an attack against an army depot in Narathiwat province was met with a violent response by government forces. Insurgent activities intensified and spread in the following months, prompting thousands of people to flee their homes (SIIA, 31 May 2005). The National Revolutionary Front Coordinate (BRN-C), a loose network of separatist militants, quickly emerged as the main insurgent group. It is believed that the BRN-C may have up to 3,000 active fighters, known as "Patani Freedom Fighters", and between 30,000 and 40,000 supporters, and that its main objectives are to drive out the Buddhist minority, discredit the Thai government and control the Malay Muslim population (HRW, 14 February 2011).

The declaration of martial law in the deep south in 2004 was followed in July 2005 by an emergency decree, still in place in 2011, which created further

dissatisfaction among Malays and increased risks of human rights abuses by providing blanket immunity to state officials (ICG, 18 November 2005, p.1). Security operations were often accompanied by widespread human rights violations against suspected militants or sympathisers (HRW, August 2007). Cases of torture, extra-judicial killings and forced disappearances, including in incidents such as the Krue Se Mosque massacre, the Tak Bai killing and later the Al-Furquan mosque attack, have since 2004 helped fuel support for the insurgency (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.5 and 22 June 2009, p.12; AI, 24 October 2006; HRW, 28 April 2006). The failure by the government to conduct impartial investigations and prosecute those responsible for the abuses in these three incidents has reinforced Malay's collective sense of injustice and further alienated them from the Thai state (AI, 13 January 2009, p.5; ICG, 28 August 2008, p.2).

Forced displacement in other regions of Thailand
Other regions of the country are also affected by internal displacement, though the causes are different. Since the 1960s, the government has forcibly relocated "hill tribes" or "highlanders" (composed of seven major ethnic groups) in the north from their mountainous villages to the lowlands (Buergin, 2000). Mainly motivated by development and economic factors but also to aiming to reduce opium cultivation, this policy has resulted in the eviction of hill tribes from their lands, generally without consultation or their involvement in the process. Many highlanders do not have Thai citizenship and have very limited access to basic social services such as education and health care. The lack of proper documentation has reportedly limited their freedom of movement and also prevented them from owning land (USDoS, April 2011, p.27).

In the west, a decade-long border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand, who both claim ownership of a patch of land around the Preah Vihear temple, has at times spilled over into fighting, prompting residents on both sides to temporarily flee their homes. Violence flared up again in 2011, forcing an estimated 50,000 people from their homes on the Thai side in two separate incidents taking place in February and April (AFP, 3 May 2011; IRIN, 9 February 2011). While most people were able to return home shortly after fighting subsided, a number of IDPs faced recovery challenges related to damage to property, presence of unexploded ordnance (UXOs), interruption of education as well as a decline in household income (Government of Thailand, 30 May 2011; CMC, 6 April 2011). In June, NGOs on both sides called on ASEAN to help find a negotiated settlement to the dispute and bring attention to the needs of the displaced (Bangkok Post, 5 June 2011).

Natural disasters, mainly floods, regularly affect Thailand displacing large numbers of people, albeit only temporarily. In October 2011, the worst floods in half a century have left a third of the country under the water, causing the death of over 500 people and displacing more than 110,000 people from their homes (AP, 6 November 2011).

Patterns of violence

According to Deep South Watch (DSW), an independent research group that monitors the conflict, over 4,800 people were killed and nearly 8,000 injured in over 11,000 violent incidents between January 2004 and October 2011. 59 per cent of the people killed were Muslim, and 38 per cent Buddhist; but, converesely, 61 per cent of those injured were Buddhist and 33 per cent Muslim (Bangkok Post, 2 November 2011; DSW, 27 September 2011, p.1; The Nation, 16 September 2011). The majority of the victims of violence, around 63 per cent according to Amnesty International (AI), were civilians from both religious communities (AI, 27 September 2011; DSW, 31 March 2011).

Insurgency-driven violence
The high proportion of civilian casualties is in

large part explained by the tactics employed by the insurgents, in particular their targeting of Buddhist civilians, who insurgents perceive as symbols of what they see as the illegitimate Thai occupation, and Muslim Munafig (or "hypocrites" seen as collaborating with the Thai state), their deployment of bombs in public locations such as markets, banks or restaurants, and their use of improvised explosive devices (IED) which result in high collateral damage. Civilian victims of the violence have included teachers, civil servants, monks and village headmen seen as too close to the Thai state, but also rubber tappers, farmers, traders, factory workers, labourers and construction workers (McCargo, 8 January 2008, p.4).

Attacks on Buddhist civilians and the use of increasingly gruesome tactics including beheading or burning alive of victims are clearly intended to spread terror among their community and force them to leave their homes, property and land (AP, 11 February 2007). Attacks have often involved the destruction of property (HRW, 12 June 2009; HRW, 14 February 2011; SIPRI, November 2007, p.10-11). In the past two years, killings appear to have followed a more calculated and less random pattern with many civilians killed in retaliation for actions and abuses by the security forces (INSS, September 2011, p. 5).

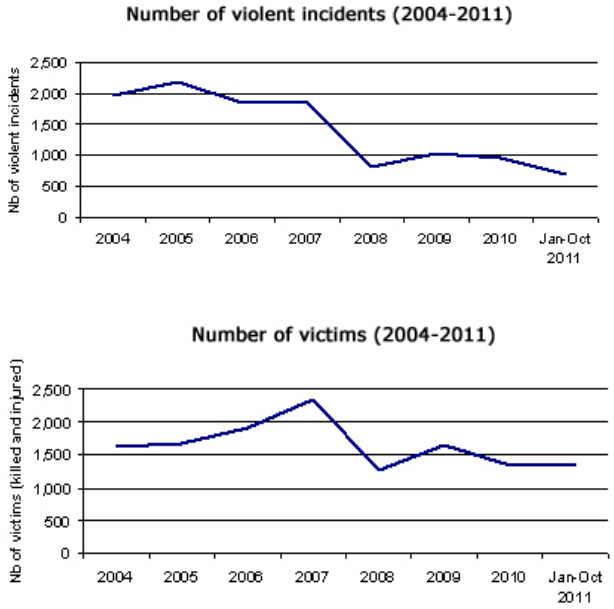
Human rights violations by government forces
Government counter-insurgency operations, targeting in particular the 217 "red zone" villages believed to be under insurgent control, have reportedly entailed widespread human rights violations against civilians suspected of sympathising with the insurgency, including extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention and torture (HRW, August 2007). They have also often failed to distinguish between civilians and militants and between adults and children. This hard-line approach created a climate of fear in affected villages and widespread trauma among the victims of ill-treatment (AI, 13 January 2009, p.5; CSI, December 2008, p.19). Suspected members of the insurgency and sympathisers have been sent to army-run "re-education camps" for several weeks, putting their safety at risk: upon return they may be killed by the insurgents as collaborators (HRW, August 2007, p.64). As a result, some people have reportedly never returned home or fled their homes after returning (IDMC, June 2011).

The increasing reliance on often poorly trained and loosely supervised paramilitary forces and civilian militias has also heightened the risk of abuses against civilians and exacerbated communal tensions (AI, 27 September 2011, p.11; AI, 13 January 2009, p.4). The government extended a programme to arm civilians in 2007, leading to an increase in the number of reported human rights abuses (AI, 13 January 2009, p.4,9). In addition to the Thahan Pran (paramilitary rangers) commanded by the armed forces and heavily involved in counter-insurgency activities, there are three village defense militias, the Chor Ror Bor, the Or Sor and the Or Ror Bor, which are engaged to various degrees in supporting the security forces. More clandestine self-defense groups have also been set up, such as the 8,000-strong Ruam Thai (Thai United), often with tacit support and training from the government (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.6)

The deployment of rangers in Malay villages, sometimes as part of "Peace Development Units" tasked with implementing development projects, has been met with suspicion and fear by some Malay villagers because their presence often disrupts their livelihoods, traditional values and leads to greater insecurity. Misconduct by rangers, in particular harassment and sometimes rape of local women, has also been reported (WGJP, 13 May 2010, p.16).

Number of violent attacks decline but become more deadly
The number of violent attacks has fluctuated over the years, but showed little sign of abating as of late 2011. From about 1,800 each year since 2004, the number of attacks dropped to about 800 in

2008 but increased again to over 1,000 in 2009, 900 in 2010 and 755 in the first ten months of 2011 (Bangkok Post, 2 November 2011; DSW, 27 September 2011). Although the number of attacks significantly declined after 2007, they became more violent. This trend has continued in 2010 and 2011 with fewer attacks but more casualties (INSS, September 2011, p. 5). The number of casualties rose from under 1,300 in 2008 to over 1,650 (back to pre-2007 levels) the following year (McCargo & Jitpiromsri, August 2010, p.2). They declined again in 2010 to around 1,345 but are set to increase again in 2011 with already 1,350 casualties recorded in the first ten months of the year.



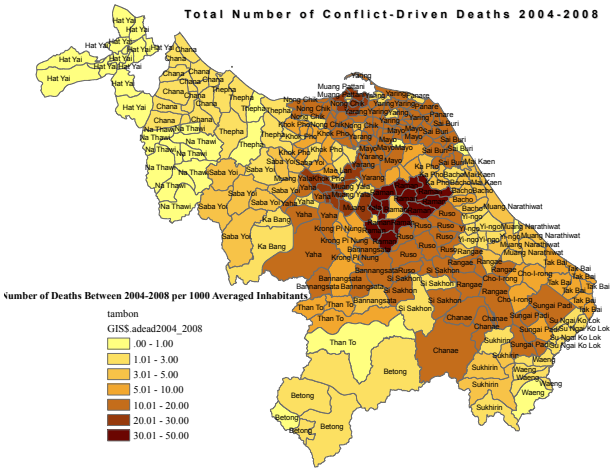
Source: Deep South Watch, 2011

The geographical distribution of violence has greatly varied over the years, as military operations in some areas forced the insurgents to move on. Violence was largely concentrated in Narathiwat in the early years but moved to Yala during 2007 and 2008, and to Pattani in 2009 (McCargo & Jitpiromsri, August 2010, p.2). The violence has been concentrated in certain "hotspot" districts or urban municipalities. Between 2004 and 2008, these included Yala city, Pattani city and the Raman municipalities (Patrawart, 2011, p.184). Violent incidents have mostly taken place near residential areas, directly affecting the security and livelihood of entire communities. People fleeing areas severely affected by violence are therefore very likely to have done so primarily out of concern for their security and that of their family.

Patterns of displacement

The largest displacement movements, in particular of Buddhists, are believed to have taken place between 2005 and 2007 when the violence was most intense and many Buddhist households were still scattered in the countryside. After 2007-08, most had moved to relatively safer urban areas, left the region or regrouped into more secure enclaves and the flight of Buddhists had largely stopped (INSS, September 2011, p.11).

Figure 2: migration outflows within the conflict zone (2004-2008)



Source: Patrawart, 2011

Data on migration and violence between 2002 and 2008 shows that the areas most affected by violence, such as Yala city, Pattani city, Sai buri, Panare Raman and Khok Pho, also had the most people leaving, showing that patterns of violence largely influenced displacement movements (Patrawart, 2011, pp.205-218). The more violence in an area, the more likely it was that people fled as far away as possible.

Year by year, more people fled to other municipalities or provinces. The percentage fleeing within the same municipality declined from nearly 60 per cent in 2004 to only 43 per cent in 2008. During the same period, the percentage fleeing within the conflict zone increased from 11 per cent to nearly 18 per cent, while the percentage fleeing outside the conflict zone increased from 29 per cent to 39 per cent (Patrawart, 2011, p.201).

The overall rate of migration out of the conflict-affected provinces has increased by 133 per cent since the violence erupted. Until 2004, more people moved into the three provinces than out, with a net in-migration rate of 1,500 per 100,000 inhabitants. However, after 2004 significantly more people moved out than into the region, resulting in a figure of 500 net out-migrants per 100,000 inhabitants (Patrawart, 2011, p.168).

The flight destinations of displaced people have varied. Among both Muslims and Buddhists, wealthier people have not only been more likely to move than poorer people but also more likely to move further away, generally out of the southern region to other provinces including Bangkok (Patrawart, 2011, pp.211-262; RRT, 23 May 2008, p.3; AFP, 19 March 2008).

A study by Chulalongkorn University showed that the majority of those who left their homes in 2004 left the three conflict-affected provinces. An estimated five per cent went as far as Bangkok, while a similar number went to neighbouring Songkhla province (Patrawart, 2011, p.178). A large number of people have reportedly fled to Songkhla's capital, Hat Yai, since 2004. The city is a prosperous commercial and trading hub, located very near the three conflict zones but relatively spared by the violence. Interviews of displaced people conducted there in 2006 and 2011 showed that the unrest but also reduced earning in a context of protracted violence were decisive factors in the decision to move there (IDMC, June 2011; Pitakkhumpol, pp.160-162). While some settled in a permanent home, many others bought a second home but continued to live in the deep south (Bangkok Post, 13 June 2011). Many (mostly Buddhist) people have decided to keep their children and family safe elsewhere, often in Hat Yai, but to keep their homes and continue working in the deep south (IDMC interview with a local official, June 2011; AI, 27 September 2011, p.8). Other flight destinations have included nearby provinces in southern Thailand such as Phatthalung or Phuket (Bangkok Post, 1 August 2008).

While Buddhists, in particular those who were not originally from the region, appear to have tended to leave the deep south, Muslims, in particular the poor and less educated coming from a rural area, have preferred to move to safer areas within their municipality or province. In one village, one family that refused to pay money and join meetings had a son killed and decided to flee to a nearby village. The father claimed: "We're still scared, but here a military base is not so far away" (AI, 27 September 2011, p.40). Being from an ethnic minority group, most had limited access to jobs and family networks in other provinces. This said, some Malay Muslims fleeing specific threats by insurgents have reportedly been internally displaced to other provinces in southern Thailand including Krabi, Chumporn and Surat Thani, or further away, for example to Chiang Mai or Bangkok. Some had their homes, property or source of livelihood destroyed, and going back is not an option as insurgents would not allow Munafig to return home (RRT, 23 May 2008, pp.2-3).

Many Malay Muslims have crossed the border to seek employment in Malaysia. There they engage in various activities in the agricultural and secondary sector, with many setting up or working for restaurants. While working in Malaysia most migrants return home on a regular basis to visit their family and friends. Having relatives or friends already working in Malaysia encourages others to also move there where they can use established migrant networks to find work and deal with

administrative requirements (Bunmak, Suttiporn, 2011, pp.37-43). Some estimates put the number of Thai Muslim Malays in Malaysia at 300,000, a significant number of them holding dual citizenship. Movements between the two countries are reportedly easy. In 2006 alone, some 50,000 people reportedly crossed the border illegally (Funston, August 2010, p.2).

IDP figures

In the absence of any systematic monitoring of conflict-related displacement by the government or other organisations, there are no accurate figures on the number of people currently displaced or on those who have been displaced since 2004. It is believed that both Muslims and Buddhists have fled in large numbers, with the latter disproportionately affected (AI, 27 September 2011, p.8). Available migration data does not reveal the motivation behind these movements, making it difficult to ascertain whether these were primarily caused by conflict-related insecurity.

What is clear is that violence has been an influential factor in the choice to move, but economic and education opportunities as well as issues of social or cultural integration have also played a major role. A study examining the link between violence and migration between 2004 and 2006 revealed that those who refused to migrate despite the violence did so because they were strongly attached to their communities and land and thought they would fail to adjust, economically and socially, in their area of displacement (Kittaworn, Lerdpipat & Pulsub, January 2007).

Information collected for this report suggests that between 30 and 50 per cent of Buddhists and between 10 and 20 per cent of Muslims may have left their homes since 2004. The largest displacement movements of Buddhists probably took place between 2005 and 2007 when violence was the most intense (AI, 27 September 2011, p. 8). Official records from 2000 put the number of Buddhists in the three provinces at around 360,000 and Muslims at 1,310,000 (NSO, 2000). Estimates of the number of displaced Buddhists have varied significantly over the years, from 30,000 to 240,000, with no credible or authoritative figures emerging. The main sources of information behind these figures are government officials, including members of the armed forces and teachers, academics, researchers and local journalists.

In 2005, it was reported that more than 10,000 people had fled Yala city during the year because of the violence (SIIA, 31 May 2005). In 2007, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that despite the absence of official government records, it was estimated that between 35,000 and 100,000 people had fled their homes (ICG, 23 October 2007, p.19). The same year, a "southern source" suggested that 15 per cent of the Buddhist population, or around 55,000 people, had left the region (AI, 27 September 2011). The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported in 2007 that between 15 and 20 per cent of the Buddhist population in Pattani province, or up to 23,000 people, had left their homes due to attacks by the insurgents (SIPRI, November 2007, p.10-11).

In 2009, it was reported in the media that 70,000 Buddhists had left the three provinces since 2004 (DPA, 13 March 2009). The same year, the chargé d'affaires at the Thai Embassy in Washington told the Washington Post that the violence had "caused the majority of Buddhists who lived in the south to move" (Washington Post, 24 July 2009). A general stated that in Pattani province, the number of Buddhists had declined from around 100,000 in 2006 to around 60,000 a year later (NVI, May 2009, p.20).

In 2010, a representative of the Advisory Council for Peace Building in the Southern Border Provinces suggested that between 220,000 and

240,000 Buddhists had left due to the violence, leaving only between 80,000 and 100,000 in the deep south (Bangkok Post, 17 February 2010).

In June 2011, the municipal mayor of Hat Yai claimed that the population of his city had increased by 200,000 since 2004, mainly due to the arrival of people fleeing the neighbouring deep south provinces (Bangkok Post, 13 June 2011). A Malay journalist from Issara news agency reported that, based on interviews with military and government officials as well as extensive field visits, she believed that close to 50 per cent of Buddhists and ten per cent of Muslims had left their homes (IDMC interview, June 2011). Another journalist interviewed by Amnesty International (AI) in 2011 estimated that the most insecure districts had lost 20 per cent of residents (AI, 27 September 2011, p.8). In September 2011, the U.S. Institute for National Strategies Studies (INSS) estimated that twenty per cent of the Buddhists had fled their homes, either moving to nearby urban areas or leaving the deep south (INSS, September 2011, p.3).

Lack of demographic evidence

While contending that the overall demographic impact of any displacement of Buddhists has been insignificant, the government in 2011 has shared figures which may point to important changes since 2000 (AI, 27 September 2011, p.54). The official number of Buddhist households in the three southernmost provinces is given as around 62,500; this would equate to about 250,000 individuals based on the average household size of 4.0 people as reported in UNDP's latest Human Development Reports for these three provinces (as of 2007), or about 206,000 based on the national average of 3.3, which may better reflect birth rates among Buddhist households (UNDP, 12 May 2010, p.142). This range represents a decline of between 31 and 43 per cent in the Buddhist population as compared with the 2000 census figures which placed the number of Buddhists at 361,000 (NSO, 2000).

A national census was conducted in 2010, but findings at the provincial level were not available at the time of the writing. It is likely that official demographic data will fail to reflect population movements, for a number of reasons:

First, it has been widely reported that people who have fled their homes since 2004 have generally kept their household registrations in their districts of origin (AI, 27 September 2011, p.8). Many people left believing their displacement would only be temporary and wanted to be able to easily return and retrieve their property. In some cases, family members left, but the head of household stayed and remained registered (Satha-Anand, 2009, p.9). Although reporting a permanent relocation is compulsory within 15 days of the move, in practise few have registered their move and most have been put under no pressure by local officials to do so (Patrawart, 2011, p.237 & personal communication, October 2011).

Second, the majority of people have moved within the deep south region, generally from rural to urban areas of the same province. Their displacement would therefore not be reflected in census data.

Third, the government has continued to support the settlement in the South of Buddhists from other regions, in particular the north-east (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.5). According to the government almost 4,200 Buddhist households have moved to the south in recent years (AI, 27 September 2011, p.54).

The demographic changes observed over a decade may also be explained by other factors such as birth or mortality rates that have less to do with conflict than with the social, economic or cultural environment, although conflict obviously also play a role in shaping that environment. While the average household size in Thailand stood at 3.6 in 2000, the two southern provinces of Narathiwat and Pattani had the largest average households

in the country, at 4.6 and 4.4 members respectively (UNDP, 2003, p.127,). If Buddhist families have fewer children or smaller households than Muslim ones, which the statistics suggest, the Muslim community is likely to expand faster than the Buddhist one and thereby increase its overall proportion (Jerryson, February 2009, p.34). There may also be migration trends that preceded the eruption of violence. Satha-Anand notes that the number of Buddhists in the region had already started declining even before 2003, possibly because their better education allowed them to seize economic opportunities outside the three provinces (Satha-Anand, 2009, p.9).

IDPs' needs and challenges

Little is known about the needs of people leaving their homes and the challenges they face, in particular those who have left the deep south. It appears that most of them, and in particular civil servants and teachers, have been able to plan their movements, for example by requesting transfers. Others have used family networks or have been encouraged to move by friends who already moved out of the provinces and could help them find a job or settle in a new, often urban, environment. In most cases it appears that most of these movements have not been accompanied by any significant humanitarian needs or other protection concerns, although information on this is scarce.

A study conducted among IDPs in Hat Yai showed the interplay of factors behind the reason to move and also the variety of displacement experiences, but it also revealed some general trends: the geographical and cultural proximity of Hat Yai which eased their integration; the help they received from friends and family members who had moved there before; and the better job and education opportunities. On the other hand some struggled to find a job without skills adapted to an urban environment. Some who had been separated from family members by their displacement suffered from isolation and lack of social ties. Some thought they were viewed by others with suspicion because they originated from one of the three conflict-affected provinces (Pitakkhumpol, 2009, p.177). Muslim businessmen who moved to the northern region also reportedly faced the suspicion of Buddhists including local officials, with the armed forces instructing provincial governors to monitor displaced Malay Muslims (RRT, 23 May 2008, p.3).

There have been reports of Buddhists either leaving the deep south due to death threats or being forced to sell their land to the insurgents, reportedly at a very low price (IDMC interviews, June 2011; Patrawart, 2011, p.179). Landmines have reportedly been planted on Buddhist-owned rubber plantations to force them to sell their land (ICG, 3 November 2010, p.4). Some fleeing Buddhists have managed to find a caretaker, sometimes a Muslim, to occupy and protect their homes and plantation in their absence. Others have been willing to sell but unable to find a buyer, reportedly because insurgents threatened to punish anyone buying from Buddhists (IDMC interviews, June 2011).

People displaced within the three provinces have remained to a large extent exposed to the conflict and its consequences. Violence related to the conflict has left many residents in the deep south at risk of indiscriminate and unpredictable violent acts by the insurgents or by agents of the state (NVI, May 2009, p.8). Relations between the Buddhist minority and the Malay Muslim majority have been disrupted, education opportunities and social services have been drastically reduced, and the economy depressed.

Attacks on teachers and schools

The insurgents have systematically attacked teachers and schools, severely reducing education opportunities in the region but also threatening the lives of students and teachers. An estimated 300 schools have been the target of arson attacks

since 2004, while up to 144 teachers and school personnel have been killed and 136 injured (Xinhua, 2 August 2011). Buddhist teachers make up around 70 per cent of the victims, but Muslim teachers have not been spared, in particular those seen as "collaborating" with the state education system (UNESCO, 10 February 2010, p.231). The killing of Buddhist teachers is openly aimed at scaring others and encouraging them to move out of the region (HRW, 20 September 2010, p.46).

Security measures taken by the government to protect schools, teachers and students seem to have paid off, with a decrease in the number of attacks on schools, staff and students (GA/SC, 23 April 2011, p.42). Five schools were attacked in 2010 compared with nine in 2009 and ten in 2008. The number of casualties also decreased to 25 in 2010 from 42 in 2009 and 43 in 2008 (UNESCO, 10 February 2010).

Most teachers now travel to work in convoys or have military forces protecting them; they have received guns, bullet-proof vests and security training. The government has also set up military camps in schools, often as a response to specific threats against the school or the teachers, but also for logistics reasons or because of their strategic location. In 2010, government security forces occupied at least 76 schools in the deep south (HRW, January 2011). The militarisation of schools, in clear violation of the rules of war (IHL), has sometimes resulted in an increase of children's exposure to violence while reducing their access to education. Many parents have transferred their children to non-occupied schools despite the longer distance and transportation costs or they have left the region (HRW, 20 September 2010, p.16).

School closures as a result of the violence have been frequent, and sometimes simultaneous across the provinces. Many teachers have also requested a transfer to other positions outside the region or have left without any guarantee of finding another position (HRW, 20 September 2010, p.39). Most have however been forced to stay to avoid losing their job-related benefits as only a well-connected minority have been able to obtain these transfers. One teacher in Yala estimated that "70 to 80 per cent of those who leave end up going back. They feel trapped." Faced with a shortage of teachers in the region, the government has met most of the teachers' demands for better security and has also increased salary and benefits to encourage teachers to stay at their post (HRW, 20 September 2010, p.51-52).

Recruitment of children by insurgents and militias
In 2006, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child saw the conflict in the southern provinces as threatening children's right to life, survival and development (CSI, JPF, March 2011, p.13). A 2008 UNICEF study revealed that children's daily exposure to violence caused most to suffer from anxiety and stress associated with the threat of violence (UNICEF, 2008, p.viii).

In addition to being subjected to violence and abuses by insurgents or law enforcement officials, children are also vulnerable to recruitment by both sides. The insurgents have recruited children, sometimes at a very young age, in mosques and the Islamic schools which host between 70 and 80 per cent of Muslim secondary-level pupils (HRW, 20 September 2010, p.80; GA/SC, 13 April 2010, p.36; ICG, 15 March 2007, p.21). Teachers play a central role in the recruitment process, with many reportedly supporting or sympathising with the insurgency, in particular in the "red zone" villages (CSI, December 2008, p.9). Those who disagree or oppose this recruitment find themselves at risk of being targeted as Munafig. Malay Muslims are strongly encouraged to let their children join the insurgent movement, and many have no choice but to cooperate or flee. The government has placed many Islamic schools under close surveillance and has arrested large number of teachers.

Children are also recruited into government-supported militias such as the Chor Ror Bor, or

informal ones such as the Ruam Thai. In addition to exposing them to weapons, their association with armed groups and their involvement in military operations makes them more vulnerable to attacks and reprisals from armed groups. In 2008, there were reports that the Ruam Thai had provided training to at least 300 Buddhist children, including some as young as eight (NVI, May 2009, p.15; CSI, December 2008, p.17). A survey conducted in 2010 by the Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers (now known as Child Soldiers International) and the Thai NGO Justice for Peace Foundation (JPF) found that in more than 65 per cent of the villages visited, children were either formal members of the local Chor Ror Bor unit or were involved in tasks related to the defense of the village (CSI, JFP, 3 March 2011).

Economic and social impact of the conflict
Before the resurgence of violence in 2004, human development indicators placed the three southern-most provinces well below other provinces in the country. The violence has seriously disrupted the regional economy, which is dependent on rubber and fruit plantations and fisheries, and also public services such as transportation, health care and education. Attacks on power supply infrastructure and mobile phone networks have caused communication and power blackouts and seriously disrupted the daily life in these provinces.

At least 60 public health volunteers and hospital staff were killed or injured and 19 community health centres were burned down or damaged between 2004 and 2007 (HRW, August 2007, p.70). These attacks have reduced the mobility of doctors and other medical personnel and further diminished the availability of health services in the provinces. While improving at the national level, health indicators have significantly declined in the deep south in the past decade. In 2007, maternal mortality was at 28.8 per 10,000 live births compared to only 12.2 in the rest of the country. Other figures from official sources put that number even much higher, at 42.4 (as of 2008) according to the Health Ministry and 51 (as of 2006) based on data from the SBPAC (Bangkok Post, 17 February 2011; IRIN, 31 December 2008).

Under-five mortality and infant mortality were both around 50 per cent higher in the deep south than in the rest of the country. What is more telling is that in 1997 infant mortality was 18 per cent lower than the national average. While it has remained stable in the rest of the country, at 7.2 per 1,000 live births between 1997 and 2007, in the deep south infant mortality increased from 5.9 in 1997 to 11 in 2007, or a 86 per cent increase (UNDP, 12 May 2010, p. 144 and 1999, p.219).

The government has invested large sums of money in development and infrastructure projects in the region since 2004, either through the military or the civilian SBPAC (which was dismantled in 2002 but revived in 2006). According to a Malay journalist, however, this has mainly resulted in the distortion of the economy and has had no positive long-term impact (AI, 27 September 2011, pp.8-9). Although the average household income in the deep south has progressed since 2000, probably as a result of important investments by the government, it remains far below the national average. In 2009, the average household income per month stood around 13,500 Baht ($440) in Pattani and 11,200 Baht ($360) in Narathiwat, against a national average of 20,300 Baht ($660) (Asia Foundation, December 2010, p.9). In 2007, poverty incidence was 85 per cent higher in the deep south than in the rest of the country (UNDP, 12 May 2010, p.151).

While government assistance to state officials who are victims of violence has included financial compensation, education and a government job for surviving children and wives, most other victims have reportedly only been provided with insufficient short-term financial support. This has failed to sustain the standard of living of the most vulnerable victims, such as female-headed households who have mostly remained without

income (WGJP, 13 May 2010, p.10; Lim, September 2009, p.86). Often the children are forced to contribute to contribute to the family income. The percentage of children aged 15-17 out of school and working is reported to have increased in the "deep south" from 20.2 to 21.5 per cent. In Pattani, it increased from 21.6 to 28.4 per cent (UNDP, 12 May 2010, p.155 and 2003, p.149).

Most victims of violence are heads of households and sources of family income. Their death or disability has generally had severe psychological and also economic consequences for their wives, children and other dependent relatives. If one includes family members, more than 53,000 people are estimated to have been directly affected by violence related to the conflict (McCargo & Jitpiromsri, August 2010, p.1). An estimated 13 per cent of victims and their families decided to flee because they felt insecure (Lim, September 2009, pp.85-86).

National response

Attracting as little international attention as possible to the deep south conflict, and ensuring that no foreign party gets involved, have been high priorities of a government concerned primarily with projecting a positive image of the country and avoiding at all costs a scenario such as those in Aceh or East Timor (Legaspi, 12 June 2009, p.17). While a number of international human rights NGO have described the conflict in the south as an "internal armed conflict", the Thai government has been very careful to avoid using this concept or other related terms such as "insurgency" (AI, 27 September 2011, p.6). It has preferred using instead the term "perpetrators of violence" or "criminals" so as to diminish the political dimension of the unrest and weaken the legitimacy of the armed groups (Askew, August 2010).

According to the government, the conflict has not resulted in any significant displacement of either the Buddhist or the Malay Muslim population. The relative individual nature of displacement movements within or from the deep south and the absence of any IDP camps have largely hidden the scale and magnitude of internal displacement caused by the conflict and its effects. The fact that a significant proportion of those fleeing the conflict-affected provinces belonged to the well-off section of the population, Buddhist or Muslim, and managed to restart their lives in areas of destination without any external assistance has also lessened the visibility of the issue.

The government has not taken any steps to assess the extent of the problem, through systematic monitoring of movements and needs, or to adopt measures and policies that would help address the issue. One such measure could include improving the collection of migration data by the Ministry of Interior, to ensure a more complete picture of migration flows and individuals' motivations for migrating from areas affected by conflict (Patrawart, 2011, p.262). There is also a need to closely examine what has happened to the land, housing and property which people have left behind.

The government's refusal to acknowledge the displacement, in particular of the Buddhist minority, reflects an overall strategy to downplay the separatist threat and dismiss any loss of legitimacy in the region. Acknowledging the exodus of government representatives and other Buddhist civilians would come close to a recognition that the insurgency has succeeded in scaring Buddhist away from the deep south. The security policies and the continuing resettlement of Buddhists to the south since 2004, which has probably prevented any "ethnic cleansing" from actually taking place, reflect this strategy (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.5).

Fearing that resettling displaced Buddhists outside the provinces would set a precedent and spark a larger exodus, the government decided instead to encourage their return and to provide increased security (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.3;

The Nation, 2 November 2007; AP, 10 December 2006). As a colonel interviewed by Non-Violence International (NVI) stated: "Once Thai Buddhists feel safe, their emigration (…) will decline and the southernmost territory and Thai sovereignty is safeguarded." (NVI, May 2009, p.20) Nationalist sentiments have been used by the government and in particular by Queen Sirikit to further motivate Buddhists to take up arms and resist their displacement in defense of the Thai "homeland" (Asia Times, 2 September 2009; NVI, May 2009, p.10).

The government's focus on preventing the displacement of the Buddhist minority and defending the "Thai homeland" at all cost has increased their exposure to violence and further inflamed the conflict; meanwhile the government has done little to ensure that those fleeing the conflict zones receive appropriate attention. Only when displacement movements were too large to be ignored, such as in late 2006 when over 200 Buddhists fled their homes to seek refuge in a temple in Yala, did the government acknowledge the displacement and provide assistance temporary assistance, encouraging them to quickly return home (The Nation, 24 December 2006). While those who moved outside the provinces have at least managed to reach safe areas and achieve some form of durable solution, the majority of IDPs have moved to urban areas inside the conflict-affected provinces where they remain at risk of violence from both sides and face serious curtailment of their fundamental rights. The government has limited its assistance to victims of violence caused by insurgent activities and their families, and does not consider that displacement or loss of property following displacement entitles victims to compensation.

Addressing socio-economic grievances and issues of injustice

The government has since 2004 implemented a number of development and infrastructure projects in the southern region, often in parallel to security operations. The SBPAC is responsible for implementing development and education projects. In 2010, the government started to implement a four-year 63 million baht ($2 billion) development plan to raise household incomes and improve the quality of life while addressing insecurity and injustice (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.8). During the first year, nearly 20 billion baht ($640 million) were allocated to fund a total of 380 projects (ICG, 3 November 2010, p.12).

According to NVI, most policies devised and implemented in the south have suffered from a number of problems, including poor coordination and a lack of common vision, between local agencies but also between them and national agencies (NVI, May 2009, p.3). The high turnover of staff has also limited the capacity to implement projects and ensure their follow-up. Since 2011, the SBPAC has operated independently of the armed forces and reported directly to the Prime Minister. In addition to a more efficient decision-making structure, the SBPAC has also been given the power to discipline and remove officials or police officers (ICG, 8 December 2009, p.8 and 3 November 2010, p.10; Bangkok Post, 20 January 2011; ICG).

International response

Interest in the conflict by the international community and the media has been minimal. This is certainly explained to some extent by successful diplomacy by the Thai government but also by a number of other factors: the fact that foreigners have not been targeted, and also that violence, though occurring on a daily basis, has not killed a sufficient number of people at once to capture the attention of international media (McCargo, June 2009, p.55 & 8 January 2008, p.5). Insecurity has also discouraged diplomats and foreigners from visiting the region.

The absence of the United Nations in the region seriously has limited its capacity to monitor and report on human rights violations committed by

any party to the conflict, or on the extent and consequences of conflict-related internal displacement. As an example, in April 2011, the UN Secretary-General recognised in his report to the Security Council that he had received information concerning the alleged forced recruitment of children by insurgent groups or government-supported militias, but he reported that the UN Country Team was "not in a position to monitor, report or verify these allegations, based on its activities in the area" (GA/SC, 23 April 2011, p.42).

Following domestic popular opinion, in particular after the Tak Bai and Krue Se mosque incidents, the government of Malaysia moved from full cooperation with its Thai neighbour based on common security concerns to an approach that showed more consideration for the protection of fellow Malay Muslims across the border. Despite having not always seen eye to eye with the Thai government on the issue of the southern conflict, Malaysia has been careful never to push the issue too hard in regional forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), where it has always abided by the regionally-agreed non-intervention doctrine (Funston, August 2010, p.11).

Note: This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on Thailand. The full profile is available online here.

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998, upon the request of the United Nations, to set up a global database on internal displacement. A decade later, IDMC remains the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement caused by conflict and violence worldwide.

IDMC aims to support better international and national responses to situations of internal displacement and respect for the rights of internally displaced people (IDPs), who are often among the world's most vulnerable people. It also aims to promote durable solutions for IDPs, through return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country.

IDMC's main activities include:

- Monitoring and reporting on internal displacement caused by conflict, generalised violence and violations of human rights;
- Researching, analysing and advocating for the rights of IDPs;
- Training and strengthening capacities on the protection of IDPs;
- Contributing to the development of standards and guidance on protecting and assisting IDPs.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

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