



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Thailand

Thailand – THA38142 – Yellow Shirts –  
Red Shirts – Conflict – Membership –  
Forced Recruitment – Catholicism

1 March 2011

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**1. Please provide a background to the conflict between the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts in Thailand including the political positions of each group.**

Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted during late 2006. Since that time, the country has experienced waves of street protests, violence and occupation of key sites<sup>1</sup> by both the Red Shirts who are said to support Thaksin and his populist policies, and the royalist Yellow Shirts whose weeks of protests assisted in ousting him.<sup>2</sup>

Thaksin Shinawatra

The rise of the Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt movements in recent years is closely linked with the ousting of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in late 2006. In short, Thaksin's TRT (or "Thais Love Thais") party had gained support in the 2001 elections from the rural north and northeast constituencies by criticising the incumbent government for favouring the urban middle class. Anti-Thaksin sentiment heightened during 2005-06, most notably as his family was criticised for a \$1.9 billion tax-free sale of Shin Corporation to the Singaporean government. Thaksin called a snap election in April 2006, but with all opposition parties boycotting, this election was then rescheduled for October 2006.

However in September 2006, a military coup ousted Thaksin Shinawatra whilst he was overseas. In May 2007, the TRT party was found "guilty of paying off smaller parties in the April 2006 elections" and dissolved by a tribunal formed by the coup leaders' Council for National Security. As a result, Thaksin was prohibited "from participating in politics for the next five years". Former members of the TRT party subsequently "regrouped under the banner of the People's Power Party (PPP) and won the December 2007 parliamentary elections". The PPP government was disbanded by the Constitutional Court in December 2008 "on the grounds that it had engaged in fraud during the December 2007 elections... Abhisit Vejjajiva, the head of the opposition, subsequently formed a new coalition and won a lower house vote to become prime minister".<sup>3</sup>

Yellow Shirts

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<sup>1</sup> "Factbox: Key Political Risks to Watch in Thailand" 2011, *Reuters*, 7 February, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-thailand-risks-idUSTRE7161EE20110207> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 -14 – Attachment 2

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House 2010, "Freedom in the World 2010 – Thailand", 1 June – Attachment 3

The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) are commonly referred to as the Yellow Shirts, due to the colour of their clothing. As noted in Question 2, the Yellow shirts are said to comprise mainly monarchists, urban elites, business people and elements of the public and military services.<sup>4</sup> Yellow is the colour for Monday in the Thai Buddhist tradition, the day King Bhumibol Adulyadej was born.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst Thaksin Shinawatra won followers in poor and regional areas during his incumbency, he also faced criticism from urban middle-class Thailand with accusations of corruption and human rights abuses. The traditional elite also reportedly felt threatened by his power. International Crisis Group (ICG) reports on PAD's origins:

"Thaksin's friend-turned-foe Sondhi Limthongkul, a media mogul, spearheaded a movement to bring him down. As this loose anti-Thaksin movement gained momentum, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) was formed. PAD adopted the slogan "We are fighting for the King" as well as yellow shirts to symbolise their political allegiance. Yellow T-shirts were in fashion for the first time in 2006 as people wore them to join the 60th anniversary of the revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej's accession to the throne."<sup>6</sup>

Thaksin faced increasing protests from the fledgling Yellow Shirts at the beginning of 2006, particularly after his family sold its shares in telecom conglomerate to Singapore.<sup>7</sup> This transaction was reportedly seen by PAD supporters as a conflict of interest.<sup>8</sup> Weeks of anti-Thaksin rallies organised by the Yellow Shirts during 2006 ultimately culminated in the bloodless coup that forced Thaksin from power. The group largely disappeared from the scene during the subsequent period of military rule, but was re-formed when fresh elections in late 2007 led to Thaksin's allies returning to power.<sup>9</sup>

In mid-2010 the ICG described the Yellow Shirts as having become a "potent conservative royalist force." The Yellow Shirts have openly presented themselves as defenders of the throne and demanded the government "protect the nation and the monarchy".<sup>10</sup> The group has generally advocated the use of *lese majeste*, or charges of insulting the monarchy.<sup>11</sup> This monarchical stance is reflected in their general platform. In 2008, the Yellow Shirts proposed a new parliamentary system whereby 70 per cent of the chamber would be appointees and only 30 per cent elected representatives. The ICG states that this proposal, though ultimately discarded, nevertheless highlights the Yellow Shirt's preference for "a system of virtuous rule

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<sup>4</sup> "Clashing Colours: Guide to Thailand Protests" 2009, *Sky News*, 13 April <http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/Thailand-Guide-To-Different-Protest-Groups-In-The-Country-Including-Red-Shirts-And-Yellow-Shirts/Article/200904215260829> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 4

<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>8</sup> "Peoples Alliance for Democracy: Origins and Leadership" Undated, Museum of Learning website, [http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Peoples Alliance for Democracy::sub::Origins And Leadership](http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Peoples_Alliance_for_Democracy::sub::Origins_And_Leadership) – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 5

<sup>9</sup> "Thai 'Yellow Shirts' form New Party" 2009 Aljazeera, Doha ([www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net)) (TV), 4 June Attachment 6

<sup>10</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>11</sup> *Human Rights Watch* 2008, "Thailand: Protest Groups and Government Should Reject Political Violence", 3 December <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/03/thailand-protest-groups-and-government-should-reject-political-violence> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 7

by unelected traditional elites”.<sup>12</sup> In 2009, *BBC News* reported difficulty in having meaningful conversations, beyond propaganda, with Yellow Shirts leaders. For instance when asked to define the group’s political orientation, core member Panthep Wongpuaphan, stated: “[w]e can say that we will never be on the left, and never be on the right, but we will be in the middle of the right thing, of the drama”.<sup>13</sup>

The Yellow Shirts’ most high profile political activities include:

- A siege of key state sites including Parliament in 2008.
- The forced closure of Bangkok’s two main airports in late November 2008. This protest lasted more than a week and left up to 250,000 foreign tourists stranded.<sup>14</sup>
- Recent protests in Bangkok over the current government’s handling of ongoing border disputes with Cambodia.<sup>15</sup>

### Red Shirts

Pro-democracy group the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), also known as the Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (DAAD), is more commonly known as the Red Shirts, again based on the colour of their clothing.<sup>16</sup> Sources report the Red Shirts as predominantly supporting Thaksin Shinawatra.<sup>17</sup> Their political platform follows a largely socialist logic: Professor Kevin Hewison of the University of North Carolina states that the Red Shirts have “increasingly proclaimed Thai society unfair, unequal and unjust” and that Thaksin Shinawatra was largely seen as a leader who aimed to assist the downtrodden in Thai society.<sup>18</sup> The Red Shirts are said to generally support Thaksin “because of his mould-breaking populist policies while in office from 2001-2006”.<sup>19</sup> Such policies, seen to address everyday needs of the Thai people, included subsidised health care and microfinance loans.<sup>20</sup> The Red Shirts claim to be “fighting against intervention in politics and the judicial system by an unelected conservative elite whom they accuse of operating with impunity and conspiring to topple democratically elected governments”. Specifically, the Red Shirts believe that the coup against Thaksin, and the dissolution of both the Thai Rak Thai Party and the People’s

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<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand’s Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>13</sup> “Where are the Thai Protestors Now?” 2009, *BBC News*, 3 February <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7865911.stm> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 8

<sup>14</sup> “Clashing Colours: Guide to Thailand Protests” 2009, *Sky News*, 13 April <http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/Thailand-Guide-To-Different-Protest-Groups-In-The-Country-Including-Red-Shirts-And-Yellow-Shirts/Article/200904215260829> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 4

<sup>15</sup> “Factbox: Key Political Risks to Watch in Thailand” 2011, *Reuters*, 7 February, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-thailand-risks-idUSTRE7161EE20110207> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>16</sup> “Thailand’s “Red Shirt” Movement” 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand’s Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 13 – Attachment 2

<sup>18</sup> Hewison, K. 2010. “Rebellion, Repression and the Red Shirts” 24 May, East Asia Forum website, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/05/24/rebellion-repression-and-the-red-shirts/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 10

<sup>19</sup> “Thailand’s “Red Shirt” Movement” 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>20</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand’s Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 13 – Attachment 2

Power Party, “were all masterminded by his influential opponents, among them royal advisers, military generals and aristocrats”.<sup>21</sup> As discussed in Question 2 the Red Shirts’ membership base is largely thought to comprise the rural poor and urban working class.

Major incidents involving the Red Shirts since 2006 include:

- Mass rallies in Bangkok from March-May 2010 which ended with a military crackdown. A *Reuters* article refers to this incident as “Thailand’s worst political violence in modern history”.<sup>22</sup>

Sources do report that due to the elitist nature of their membership, the Yellow Shirts appear to enjoy some degree of natural bias from the state. *Reuters* recently reported that both military and judiciary are reportedly influenced by Thailand’s elite establishment, and that these arms of government have contributed towards actions which have gone against Red Shirt demonstrators.<sup>23</sup> Queen Sirikit drew attention when she attended the funeral of a Yellow Shirt protestor who died during a 2008 clash with police.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. What is known about the hierarchy and membership of each of these groups?

Sources refer to the Yellow Shirts with terms such as a “loose network of mass support”<sup>25</sup> and a “collection”<sup>26</sup> of followers; and to the Red Shirts as a “movement” and “loosely organised through the patronage networks of Thaksin-supported political parties...”.<sup>27</sup> Members of both camps are often referred to as “protestors”.<sup>28 29</sup> This language implies that both the Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts may be seen as political movements or pressure groups rather than exclusive, highly structured or rank and file-focused organisations. Nevertheless, some information was located on each group’s leadership and support bases.

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<sup>21</sup> “Thailand’s “Red Shirt” Movement” 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May  
<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>22</sup> “Factbox: Key Political Risks to Watch in Thailand” 2011, *Reuters*, 7 February,  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-thailand-risks-idUSTRE7161EE20110207> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>23</sup> “Factbox: Key Political Risks to Watch in Thailand” 2011, *Reuters*, 7 February,  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-thailand-risks-idUSTRE7161EE20110207> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>24</sup> “Thailand Reds Shirts Yellow Shirts Duel Over Victim Compensation” 2010, *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 21  
[http://www.csmonitor.com/World/2010/0421/Thailand-reds-shirts-yellow-shirts-duel-over-victim-compensation/\(page\)/2](http://www.csmonitor.com/World/2010/0421/Thailand-reds-shirts-yellow-shirts-duel-over-victim-compensation/(page)/2) – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 11

<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand’s Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>26</sup> “Factbox: Key Political Risks to Watch in Thailand” 2011, *Reuters*, 7 February,  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-thailand-risks-idUSTRE7161EE20110207> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>27</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand’s Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 13-14 – Attachment 2

<sup>28</sup> “Thailand’s “Red Shirt” Movement” 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May  
<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>29</sup> *Human Rights Watch* 2008, “Thailand: Protest Groups and Government Should Reject Political Violence”, 3 December  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/03/thailand-protest-groups-and-government-should-reject-political-violence> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 7

<sup>29</sup> “Factbox: Key Political Risks to Watch in Thailand” 2011, *Reuters*, 7 February,  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-thailand-risks-idUSTRE7161EE20110207> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 1

## Yellow Shirts

As noted in Question 1, media mogul Sondhi Limthongkul is the de facto founder of the Yellow Shirts movement.

Aside from Sondhi, the Yellow Shirts' "central committee" reportedly consists of:

- Major General Chamlong Srimuang
- Activist Phiphob Thongchai
- State enterprise labour union leader Somsak Kosaisuuk
- University lecturer and social activist Somkeit Pongpaibul.

Beneath the central committee, a management committee reportedly consists of a further ten other people. Sources report that "[o]ther leaders" exist outside of this committee structure, and that several individuals who have worked for Sondhi Linthongkul are said to play a role in leading the movement.<sup>30</sup>

Sources suggest that the Yellow Shirt's support base is "A mix of royalists, academics, business people and retired military". A 2009 *Sky News* article likens the Yellow Shirts to "Thailand's old elite".<sup>31</sup> In this vein, the ICG refers to the group's original members as a mix of conservative elites and the urban middle class who have formed a "royalist-liberal alliance" and "gradually become a potent conservative royalist force".<sup>32</sup> Central committee member General Chamlong Srimuang is said to have close ties with the most senior adviser to the King.<sup>33</sup>

In June 2009, the Yellow Shirts formed a formal political arm, known as the "New Politics" party. Sondhi led the party until he resigned in May 2010 in order to fully resume his place leading the Yellow Shirt movement.<sup>34</sup> The Yellow Shirts also have a television station, ASTV, which broadcasts its messages, or "propaganda", nationwide from its studios in central Bangkok.<sup>35</sup>

Yellow Shirt leaders are said to be reluctant to speak to reporters, and that in February 2009, BBC News reported that "much about the PAD still remains a mystery, in particular where its funding originates and the identity of its most powerful backers".<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Peoples Alliance for Democracy: Origins and Leadership" Undated, Museum of Learning website, [http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Peoples\\_Alliance\\_for\\_Democracy::sub::Origins\\_And\\_Leadership](http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Peoples_Alliance_for_Democracy::sub::Origins_And_Leadership) – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 5

<sup>31</sup> "Clashing Colours: Guide to Thailand Protests" 2009, *Sky News*, 13 April <http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/Thailand-Guide-To-Different-Protest-Groups-In-The-Country-Including-Red-Shirts-And-Yellow-Shirts/Article/200904215260829> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 4

<sup>32</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>33</sup> "The Colours of War" 2010, *The Age*, 27 April, <http://www.theage.com.au/world/the-colours-of-war-20100426-tna5.html> – Accessed 22 February 2011 – Attachment 12

<sup>34</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 13 – Attachment 2

<sup>35</sup> "Where are the Thai Protestors Now?" 2009, *BBC News*, 3 February, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7865911.stm> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 8

<sup>36</sup> "Where are the Thai Protestors Now?" 2009, *BBC News*, 3 February <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7865911.stm> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 8



An opinion piece on *The Nation* website urges caution in using Yellow and Red Shirt stereotypes. Citing a research paper released by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), the article states that Red Shirt supporters are not necessarily the stereotyped poor people of the North-east, and that advocates of the Yellow Shirts do not have to be “elitist, conservative” elements of society. The author argues that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish members of one group from the other.<sup>37</sup>

With regard to the military and its role in quelling protests, it is noteworthy that the current army chief, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, is a royalist who is said to have surrounded himself with allies in top positions and maintaining a “zero-tolerance approach to the red shirts”.<sup>38</sup> However sources report that the military is as divided in terms of Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt supporters as the rest of Thai society, “from its most senior officers to its basic conscripts”.<sup>39</sup>

### Red Shirts

Ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is assumed to be the UDD’s de facto leader. The Red Shirts have at least 20 main leaders, “several of whom have served in Thaksin’s parties or have a history of pro-democracy activism”, although it is widely assumed that Thaksin is the Red Shirts’ de facto leader and principal financier.

The Red Shirts consist mostly “of members of the rural poor and urban working class” from the Northern and North-eastern regions of Thailand.<sup>40</sup> Professor Hewison describes the Red Shirt movement as “class-based, regionalised and heterogeneous in membership and leadership.” Divisions within the group exist as to whether the actual return to power of Thaksin himself is desirable.<sup>41</sup>

The Red Shirts also claim “to have spies in the police, the government and the military tipping them off about developments”. *Reuters* states that the Red Shirts have proven “to be a well-organised and powerful extra-parliamentary force, holding regular protests in Bangkok and in their northern and North-eastern strongholds, sometimes attracting tens of thousands for days, if not weeks”.

The Red Shirts have a number of ‘political schools’ throughout Thailand, “organisations at national, provincial, district and village levels responsible for fund-raising and recruiting”, as well as their “own television channel, magazine, websites, merchandise shops and music album”. Dozens of community radio stations have been “used to recruit supporters and mobilise people for rallies”. In addition, “[p]rotest sites have masseuses, infirmaries, showers, canteens and dozens of vendors selling snacks, cigarettes, T-shirts and coffee”, while

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<sup>37</sup> “How Do You Tell a Red from Yellow When it’s White?” 2011, *The Nation*, 10 February  
<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/home/How-do-you-tell-red-from-yellow-when-its-white--30148321.html> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 13

<sup>38</sup> “Factbox: Key Political Risks to Watch in Thailand” 2011, *Reuters*, 7 February,  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-thailand-risks-idUSTRE7161EE20110207> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>39</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand’s Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 10 – Attachment 2

<sup>40</sup> “Thailand’s “Red Shirt” Movement” 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May  
<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>41</sup> Hewison, K. 2010. “Rebellion, Repression and the Red Shirts” 24 May, *East Asia Forum*,  
<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/05/24/rebellion-repression-and-the-red-shirts/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 10

hundreds of 'red shirt guards' provide security at rallies. Red Shirt members also carry UDD identification cards.<sup>42</sup>

*Reuters* reports that "[t]he presence of shadowy, black-clad gunmen during the...clashes suggests to some [that] the red shirts have a paramilitary arm"; however the Red Shirts have denied any knowledge of "the mysterious assailants". Nevertheless, the Thai government asserts that the Red Shirts have "hundreds of assault rifles and grenade launchers stashed away, many stolen from fleeing troops during the riot".<sup>43</sup>

### **3. Are there any reported instances of people being recruited to either of these organisations against their will?**

No reports were located of either the Yellow Shirts or the Red Shirts forcibly recruiting people into their movement.

A number of reports do indicate that the Red Shirts regularly rally for recruits via community radio stations and through local residents, particularly in Thailand's north-east. *Reuters* states that the Red Shirts have "scores of 'political schools' across the country", as well as "organisations at national, provincial, district and village levels responsible for fund-raising and recruiting". In addition, "[c]ommunity radio stations [are] used to recruit supporters and mobilise people for rallies".<sup>44</sup> A March 2010 article reports a recruitment drive carried out by the Red Shirts prior to demonstrations. The movement reportedly used "motorbikes and pickup trucks to distribute leaflets in a bid to recruit more red-shirt supporters". In particular, the Red Shirts "want to expand their mainly rural support base".<sup>45</sup> An *ABC News* report similarly states that in April 2010, "[a]bout 2,000 Red Shirts had left central Bangkok to spread their campaign to others".<sup>46</sup>

Limited information on the Yellow Shirts and recruitment was located. Notably, following the founding of their New Politics Party, the Yellow Shirts were required to fulfil legal requirements, including the recruitment of at least 5,000 members to the new political wing in all regions, and establishment of one branch in every region within one year.<sup>47</sup> However no reports were located to suggest that the Yellow Shirts resorted to forced recruitment in order to fulfil these obligations.

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<sup>42</sup> "Thailand's 'Red Shirt' Movement" 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>43</sup> "Thailand's 'Red Shirt' Movement" 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>44</sup> "Thailand's 'Red Shirt' Movement" 2010, *Reuters AlertNet*, 10 May

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE6490GU.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 9

<sup>45</sup> "Red Thai Protesters in Recruitment Drive" 2010, *Euronews*, 19 March

<http://www.euronews.net/2010/03/19/red-thai-protesters-in-recruitment-drive/> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 14

<sup>46</sup> "Thai Soldier Killed in Red Shirt clashes" 2010, *ABC News*, 29 April

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/28/2885119.htm> – Accessed 6 October 2010 – Attachment 15

<sup>47</sup> "Thailand's PAD Tries a New Politics Party" 2009, New Mandala: New Perspectives on Mainland and Southeast Asia, Australian National University website,

<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2009/07/07/thailands-pad-tries-a-new-politics-party/> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 16

#### **4. Has the level of conflict between these groups improved or deteriorated since October 2008?**

Sources report that both the Red Shirts and the Yellow Shirts have continued to clash with both the state and with each other since October 2008. Incumbent Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has recently stated that he will call an election during the first half of 2011 provided that there are no fresh outbreaks of violence.<sup>48</sup>

##### The Yellow Shirts and the State

In late 2008, the Yellow Shirts led a series of disruptive mass protests against the state, particularly the then Prime Minister Somchai who was seen to be a Thaksin crony. Human Rights watch reports that on October 7, police dispersed around 2000 Yellow Shirt protesters from Parliament, using teargas and rubber bullets at close range. Yellow Shirts retaliated with guns, slingshots, bricks, flag poles and metal pipes. During this incident two Yellow Shirts died, four required amputation and a further 439 were injured. Twenty police officers were injured, including some who were run over by trucks. In November, subsequent protests were held around Government House, Parliament, and the nearby Bangkok Metropolitan Police Headquarters. The Yellow Shirts seized passenger buses and used them as both barricades and transport to shuttle their followers from one protest site to another. The Yellow Shirts successfully cut electricity to the Parliament and forced a joint session between the House of Representatives and the Senate to be cancelled on November 24. The following day, they disrupted the government's attempt to hold a cabinet meeting at the Thai armed forces headquarters. Also on November 25, Yellow Shirts began their occupation of Suvarnabumi international airport and expanded to occupy Don Muang international airport on November 27.

Many protesters were armed throughout these protests. For example, six Yellow Shirts were arrested on November 24 as they attempted to "take over passenger bus number 53 from in front of the United Nations regional headquarters, using machetes, guns, and homemade grenades". Furthermore, protesters were arrested attempting to smuggle weapons into the Suvarnabumi airport protest site in a van marked with Red Cross symbols. BBC also states that there are well documented incidents of Yellow shirts firing guns at both the police and their opponents.<sup>49</sup> People thought to be government sympathisers were detained by some Yellow Shirts at protest sites. Human Rights Watch also reported in 2008 that the Yellow Shirts enjoyed support from anti-government political parties, some of the business community and elements of the military and police.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Thai Election Likely in the First Half of 2011" 2011, Thailand Business News website, 10 February <http://thailand-business-news.com/politics/29131-thai-election-likely-in-first-half-of-2011> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 17

<sup>49</sup> "Where are the Thai Protestors Now?" 2009, *BBC News*, 3 February <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7865911.stm> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 8

<sup>50</sup> *Human Rights Watch* 2008, "Thailand: Protest Groups and Government Should Reject Political Violence", 3 December <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/03/thailand-protest-groups-and-government-should-reject-political-violence> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 7



During the late 2008 period, Yellow Shirts leader Sondhi Limthongkul actively encouraged the protesters to be willing to “sacrifice their lives” to defend their ground.<sup>51</sup> In April 2009 there was an assassination attempt on Sondhi’s life with over 100 bullets fired. It is unknown whether the assailants were political opponents or members of the state apparatus.<sup>52</sup>

Most recently, the Yellow Shirts have been protesting against the State’s handling of ongoing border disputes with Cambodia. In August 2010, the movement began to hold rallies in Bangkok. In August, the Yellow Shirts held rallies in Bangkok against “Cambodia’s submission of a management plan for the Preah Vihear temple to the World Heritage Committee, which, the Yellow Shirts claim, includes the disputed 4.6 sq km area around the temple.”<sup>53</sup> The Yellow Shirts are asking the government to take a tougher line with Cambodia in relation to the issue, and have staged weeks of protests in Bangkok over January and February 2011. On 8 February *Reuters* reported that the government had enacted security provisions to ban protests in key areas throughout central Bangkok for a period of two weeks.<sup>54</sup>

### Red Shirts and the State

The Red Shirts most notably held weeks of anti-government protests from 12 March until 19 May 2010. These protests were peppered with violent “street battles” involving Red Shirts, armed militants sympathetic to the Red Shirt cause, Thai security forces and other pro-government protesters. Human Rights Watch reports that during this conflict there were at least 85 deaths and 1898 people injured.<sup>55</sup> *The Christian Science Monitor* reports that during one day of clashes during early April alone, where police used rubber bullets and teargas and protesters used sticks and homemade bombs, five soldiers and 16 civilians were killed whilst 834 people were injured. The report refers to the situation as Thailand’s “deadliest political violence since 1992”.<sup>56</sup> Hundreds of Red Shirts were detained during and after the protests.<sup>57</sup>

During this prolonged protest period, the state enacted emergency powers to censor media outlets associated with the Red Shirt movement, including over 400 websites, a satellite television station, online television channels and community radio stations. Critics argue that

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<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Watch 2008, “Thailand: Protest Groups and Government Should Reject Political Violence”, 3 December <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/03/thailand-protest-groups-and-government-should-reject-political-violence> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 7

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International 2010, *Annual Report 2009*, p. 320 – Attachment 18

<sup>53</sup> International Crisis Group, 2010 *Update Briefing No 113, Stalemate in Southern Thailand*, November 3 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/B113%20-%20Stalemate%20in%20Southern%20Thailand.ashx> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 19

<sup>54</sup> “Thailand Imposes Tough Security Laws Ahead of Protests” 2011, *Reuters*, 8 February <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/08/thailand-politics-idUSTST00021620110208> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 20

<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch 2010, “Thailand: Conduct Independent Inquiry Into Political Violence”, 24 May <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/05/24/thailand-conduct-independent-inquiry-political-violence> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 21

<sup>56</sup> “Thailand Protests: ‘Red Shirt’ Protestors Rule out Talks with Government” 2010, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 11 April <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/0411/Thailand-protests-Red-shirt-protesters-rule-out-talks-with-government> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 22

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Watch 2010, “Thailand: Conduct Independent Inquiry Into Political Violence”, 24 May <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/05/24/thailand-conduct-independent-inquiry-political-violence> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 21

this censorship breaches freedom of expression.<sup>58</sup> Red Shirt Facebook pages have also been censored. Some anti-Red Shirt Facebook pages are said to exist. In 2010 *The Christian Science Monitor* reported on an active group with almost 500 members called “Enjoy the Red Body”. This page featured a photo of a dead Red Shirt protester. Whether or not the administrator of this group identified as a Yellow Shirt was not reported.<sup>59</sup>

In October 2010 *Xinhua Net* reported that Red Shirts members had “undergone weapons training in preparing to create unrest and assassinate important figures, especially on days marking important political events”.<sup>60</sup> In the same month, a group of Red Shirt Supporters drew media attention when they submitted an asylum claim via a petition to United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon at the United Nations regional office in Bangkok.<sup>61</sup>

### Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts

Whilst reports noted above refer to instances with a clear degree of state involvement, there are some reports to indicate that outright conflict between the two groups has continued since 2008.

During the Yellow Shirts spate of protests in 2008, leader Sondhi Limthongkul openly criticised the state via a television broadcast for being “too lenient towards the Red Shirts”.<sup>62</sup> Following the prolonged Red Shirt protests in the first half of 2010, thousands of pro-government supporters, or “multi-colour shirts” began rallying against the Red Shirts in Bangkok. These pro-government supporters were thought by some to be Yellow Shirts in disguise and “the show of strength by both groups at the height of the Red Shirt protest raised concerns that serious civil strife could erupt.”<sup>63</sup>

In 2010 a business website reported on the roles of both groups in protests. It stated:

Unfortunately, both sides, red and yellow, have a thuggish minority who has engaged in extreme forms of violence. There have been clashes between rival supporters as well as mysterious bomb attacks some even blame on a ‘third hand’ hidden group trying to foment instability.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Human Rights Watch* 2010, “Thailand: Conduct Independent Inquiry Into Political Violence”, 24 May <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/05/24/thailand-conduct-independent-inquiry-political-violence> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 21

<sup>59</sup> “Thailand’s Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts Battle it out on Facebook” 2010, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 May, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2010/0524/Thailand-s-red-shirts-and-yellow-shirts-battle-it-out-on-Facebook> – Accessed 15 February 2011 – Attachment 23

<sup>60</sup> “Weapons training of Thai “red-shirts” confirmed: DSI” 2010, *Xinhua Net* website, 6 October [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/06/c\\_13544519.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/06/c_13544519.htm) – Accessed 22 February 2011 – Attachment 24

<sup>61</sup> “Reds’ Rep Submit Letter to UN Chief” 2010, *Bangkok Post*, 26 October, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/203306/reds-hand-letter-to-ban-through-representative> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 25

<sup>62</sup> *Human Rights Watch* 2008, “Thailand: Protest Groups and Government Should Reject Political Violence”, 3 December <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/03/thailand-protest-groups-and-government-should-reject-political-violence> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 7

<sup>63</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, *Bridging Thailand’s Deep Divide*, Asia Report N°192, 5 July, p. 12 – Attachment 2

<sup>64</sup> “The Bizarre Story of How Peaceful Bangkok Became the World’s Hottest Battle Zone” 2010, *Business Insider* website, 23 December <http://www.businessinsider.com/understanding-the-bangkok-riots-2010-4#fun-and-games-sort-of-12> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 26

A report was located indicating that a Yellow Shirt supporter was killed by a Red Shirt supporter in Thailand's North-east during 2009. Six months later 15000 Yellow Shirts rallied in the area, and 2000 police were deployed to prevent further clashes.<sup>65</sup>

Recently, five bomb suspects, representing both Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts, were arrested in Bangkok. The *Bangkok Post* reported that leaders from both groups accused the police of setting up the arrests and of trying to provoke a clash between the Red and Yellow Shirts.<sup>66</sup>

Some reports of positive Yellow Shirt-Red Shirt relations were located. For example in November 2010 a Yellow Shirt leader was reported as stating that the group did not wish to confront the Red Shirts if both groups rallied the same draft amendment issue at Parliament.<sup>67</sup> Business Insider website describes Thai political protests as having a curiously "positive, carnival-like atmosphere. Key leaders sing songs to dancing crowds...it is usually a big party".<sup>68</sup>

## **5. Do Catholics have the freedom to practise their religion in Thailand? Are there any reported instances of harm or mistreatment of Catholics in Bangkok or regional areas since 2008?**

The US Department of State (USDOS) reports that freedom of religion is protected under the Thai Constitution and Thai legislation and, furthermore, that this freedom is generally respected.<sup>69 70</sup>

The Thai government officially recognises five religions, including Christianity. The Thai penal code prohibits the insult or disturbance of religious places or services of officially recognised religions. The government recognises five Christian organisations: the Catholic Mission of Bangkok (Roman Catholic); the Church of Christ in Thailand (Protestant); the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (Protestant); Saha Christchak (Baptist); and the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Thailand. The oldest of these groupings, the Church of Christ in Thailand, was formed in 1934 and claims 114,260 adherents. In total, 2000 census data reported that there were an estimated 438,600 Christians in Thailand, constituting 0.7 per cent of the population.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "Yellow Shirts to 'Invade' Red Bastions" 2009, *Bangkok Post*, 15 February <http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/11651/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 27

<sup>66</sup> "Reds, Yellows Cry 'Set Up' in Bomb Arrests" 2011, *Bangkok Post*, 26 January <http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/11651/> – Accessed 11 February 2011 – Attachment 28

<sup>67</sup> "Yellow Shirts do Not Want to Confront Red Shirts on Nov 23-25 Rally at Parliament" 2010, *Bangkok Post*, 21 November <http://www.pattayadailynews.com/en/2010/11/21/yellow-shirts-do-not-want-to-confront-red-shirts-on-nov-23-25-rally-at-parliament/> – Accessed 14 February 2011 – Attachment 29

<sup>68</sup> "The Bizarre Story of How Peaceful Bangkok Became the World's Hottest Battle Zone" 2010, Business Insider website, 23 December <http://www.businessinsider.com/understanding-the-bangkok-riots-2010-4#fun-and-games-sort-of-12> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 26

<sup>69</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Thailand*, 17 November <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148897.htm> – Attachment 30

<sup>70</sup> US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Thailand*, 26 October Attachment 31

<sup>71</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Thailand*, 17 November <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148897.htm> – Attachment 30

Sources indicate that the freedom to practice the Catholic faith is generally respected. Christian website Asianews.it reports that in August 2010, the Bishop's Conference of Thailand presented its five year pastoral plan to church officials at an Assumption day Mass. Over 1000 people attended the service.<sup>72</sup>

No individual reports of ill treatment of Catholics in either Bangkok or rural Thailand were found. Religious groups proselytise freely and there were no reports of missionaries experiencing harassment or deportation for proselytising whilst on tourist visas.<sup>73 74</sup> The USDOS reports that in 2009 the Religious Affairs Department (Thai government) budgeted approximately \$615,000 (20 million baht) for the restoration of religious buildings of non-Buddhist religious groups. Some of these funds were used to repair 78 churches.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> "In Bangkok Catholic Church Presents its Five-year Pastoral Plan to 2015" 2010, Asianews.it website, August 16– <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/In-Bangkok-Catholic-Church-presents-its-five-year-pastoral-plan-to-2015-19201.html#> – Accessed 21 February 2011 – Attachment 32

<sup>73</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Thailand*, 17 November, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148897.htm> – Attachment 30

<sup>74</sup> US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Thailand*, 26 October Attachment 31

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