

Interview 26: THAILAND: Puttanee Kangkan

Ms. Puttanee Kangkan is from the Working Group on Justice for Peace (WGJP). She is the author of Understanding and Practice of Torture in the Thai Context.

What do you think of the policing system in your country?

The system is not good at all; the police themselves complain about the system. There is a lot of corruption, misuse of authority, discrimination as well as illegal actions done by the police. There have been several attempts to change the workings of the police bureau but nothing has worked. Of course, I think the police bureau should be different. The change should start with the attitudes of the police officers. Most people in Thailand think that the police is an organization of corruption, abused power, and bad practices, therefore, many people who enter into this organization aim to these purposes. People in the police society, including the police academy, should start to change their attitudes by holding new thoughts and ideals, where the policing institution is one that is clean, honest, trustworthy and reliable.

What do you think of police's use of torture?

Of course, it is very bad to use torture on civilians. It ruins the investigation entirely; interrogations as well as the judicial procedures. It is because of torture that people trust police less and disregard the credibility of the judicial system.

What is your idea of good relationship between the police and the citizens?

The police should work to provide a service to citizens, rather than abuse their power over ordinary people. They are funded by the tax money of the people. In this sense, Thailand is a country that practices a double standard; once you are someone in society, you get better service from government agencies than those who have less power and credibility. In fact, the police seem to treat suspects or people who have been arrested as though they have already been convicted for committing a crime. The notion of assuming someone is innocent until they have been proven guilty does not prevail among Thai police. My idea of a good relationship between the police and Thai citizens is that the police should treat everyone equally and assume the innocence of every arrested person.

If you have a problem, would you feel safe going to the police to make a complaint?

I'm not sure that I would feel safe making a complaint, but I would make the complaint to the police anyway because they are responsible for maintaining order and good practices in society. I think we have to help each other to improve the existing institution so that it is responsive to citizens and works properly, rather than ignoring the problems entirely.

Is there a law against domestic violence in your country? If yes, is it well implemented? If not, what are the problems?

Yes, there are laws against domestic violence, and they keep improving as the women's rights movement in Thailand becomes stronger and stronger. The implementation of these laws is on its way. It might not be perfect yet, but at least women have channels to go through when they suffer domestic abuse.