

First of all, on behalf of the Siddhi-Issara Foundation, I would like to thank Pridi Banomyong International College, Thammasat University, for its firm integrity, as an educational institution bearing Pridi Banomyong's name, in having graciously agreed to provide us with a physical location and also for taking great care in hosting the event.

I am here simply to do the duty of introducing the background of today's event, which is a result of roughly three intertwined factors.

First, and in the first place, this event came out of mere necessity. Early this year, I was able to charter the Siddhi-Issara Foundation to oversee the Ratsadonprasong Bail Fund which helps defendants in political cases. That led to the problem of how to secure the funds to hire foundation staff to do the work of posting bail, coordinating, recordkeeping, and accounting, all of which has for years been done by volunteers constantly running on empty. My policy since establishing the bail fund has been that the money in the bail fund account is to be reserved strictly for political defendants and that not a single baht is to be withdrawn for work-related expenses or compensation. Every expense for all these years has therefore been shouldered personally by volunteers and long-term guarantees of compensation are therefore absent for those willing to take up the mantle as foundation staff.

Someone proposed that we should organize an event to fundraise for the foundation via ticket sales. And then somebody else graciously offered themselves to give a special lecture for the occasion. But in the end, once I ruminated on the lecturer's identity, Ajaan Worachet Pakeerat, I felt awkward about the idea of selling tickets, because—you're probably thinking what I'm thinking, right?—Ajaan Worachet the Jurist is already a national treasure of the people, who has long transcended the condition of having anyone put a price tag on him for meet-and-greets or for lecture seats. And so the plan to organize a fundraising talk was shelved.

But then a second factor coming from the bail fund's work, again, propelled the idea forward. In the past several months, verdicts have begun to come in in the cases we've provided bail for. As bail bondspersons we were perturbed by these verdicts, especially in cases involving Article 112 of the Criminal Code, which left us thinking that something abnormal must be going on. And if there is anyone who can tie together that abnormality in the most concise and cogent way, none other than Ajaan Worachet will fit the bill. For that reason the fundraising talk was picked up again and turned into a public lecture, not just for this public gathered here in this lecture hall today, but our hope is to broadcast it as well to the individuals, the organizations, and the institutions that have played a part, so that they may be

compelled to take a look at what happened retrospectively and introspectively, or with what may be called maturity, especially on this occasion, which marks a decade since Ajaan Worachet's concrete proposal to amend Article 112 on 15 January 2012 here at Thammasat University.

That brings me to the third factor, which came serendipitously. As I intended the Siddhi-Issara Foundation to have the additional mission of creating what may be called an Archive of the Will, it just so happened that Ajaan Worachet entrusted to us the letters and postcards he had received in that period of going public with the Article 112 amendment proposal ten years ago. They encompass both fan mail and hate mail. As collected objects, they evince the content and the form of communicative efforts in that era: writing by hand or by typewriter, folding a letter in an envelope, putting on a stamp, filling in the addressee, and waiting days for the delivery of one's message. In those that feature illustrations, effort was put into cutting and gluing them on. And I am certain that if we take time to inspect them more closely, we will be able to distinguish between letters from the general public and letters from the Info Ops of yore. We have therefore selected some examples to be displayed in front of the lecture hall today, to add to the mood of retrospection, which may also be nostalgic.

But of course, the letters displayed here will not include any laudatory ones, as I can deduce that as much as Ajaan Worachet may feel appreciative of the good will and generosity of the writers of those letters, he probably won't be comfortable with being portrayed as a hero to the extent of glorifying him. So today we only exhibit the other side which might instead paint him to be a bit of a tragic hero.

Actually, certain other letters exist that, despite not agreeing with Ajaan Worachet's proposal, lay out their counterarguments in a sincere manner and without the need to display maliciousness. They are not part of the selection here today, because the authors revealed their identities as if to reaffirm the purity of their intentions, so I will read you all an extract from such a letter to close out, before handing the stage over to Ajaan Worachet.

The author of this letter comes from Surin Province. She begins by saying that she does not know Ajaan Worachet personally, but is writing because she saw that he is the core leader of Khana Nitrat who proposed amendments to Article 112, of which she writes:

I must confess that I do not have the tried-and-true information whether or not they are good and beneficial for the monarchical institution. Some say that the amendments will serve to protect the institution. Others say they will diminish and destroy royal authority. In any case, I have not looked too much into it, only absorbed what news I saw on the papers, on several television channels, and on the internet here and there. I could not come to a judgment whether they are good or not.

But when it comes to me personally, Professor, I have to write you a letter. The arhat of my house has been devastated and depressed by the news, sometimes on television, sometimes on the papers, that they are going to topple the king. This was too much for me, her child, to witness. Try as I might to explain it, my mother just could not understand, perhaps because I did not understand it either, so I could not make her understand it. [...] I would simply like to point out, Professor, so you look at it from another perspective of a fellow citizen of yours, who is old, whose eyes are turning gray because of blurred vision: how devastated she is by the actions of Khana Nitirat.

And in the midst of her pleas, this letter writer also leaves with a thought:

I am of the view that at this time the country has enough problems, and that it is not yet time to broach the subject of this article. But once this time period is over, I will not take issue at all. And you might have my support as well.

Her letter is dated 7 February 2555. Now, ten years have passed. Is she, together with those who share her opinion, ready for us all to talk about it once again? Because in all that distance that has been spent waiting for “the time” to arrive, many fellow citizens of hers, as well, have suffered: not only devastated and depressed, but also detained, separated, silenced, both in the sense of having to keep quiet and in the sense of having died or disappeared. So very many by now. The hope that we as fellow Thai people will open our mouths and talk to one another in a considerate and straightforward manner about just one article of the law of the country should not be something out of reach—now that so much more than a lifetime has elapsed.

I think of the letters from a former village schoolteacher, who put great care in writing to ask for knowledge from and to give moral support to Ajaan Worachet. They were a brief but unbroken series of letters, from the day he said he was 79 years old in March 2012, to his 80th birthday on 28 April the same year, to the year 2015 when he wrote again at the age of 83 on the backside of a piece of paper torn from a wall calendar. And he gave his blessings for victory with the same line he had always ended his letters on: “I am the wall of copper and rampart of iron. I will stand by your side always. Rest assured that we will not abandon you.”

And my impression is, that was the last letter.

Today’s lecture by the Siddhi-Issara Foundation is dedicated to the decade of distance between the people and the people, and between the people and the monarchy, a distance that remains chronically unbridged as a consequence of this one article of law, about which I would like to ask Ajaan Worachet Pakeerat to take us on a journey in retrospect.

Please join me in welcoming Ajaan Worachet Pakeerat with a round of applause.