

Declaration of the “New Isaan”

“Who is there to make ways for us to live – if we don’t struggle for [ourselves], who then would help us.”

We are Isaan people...we are called Isaan people because we were born in the land northeast of Bangkok, the capital of the country.

We are human beings...we are the product of the land that was given the name Isaan, a land that Thailand imagines only as dry and barren, inhabited by people who are poor and stupid.

When under the control of those in power from the central region, this land is seen as abundant. The power to govern ourselves has been slowly taken out of our hands. [To the point that] Isaan became only a supply source for cheap labor and poor farmers to offer their products at low prices according to state policies. [The region’s] forest, water and mineral sources [seem to exist] only for the industries of Thailand and foreign countries.

Not only these high powers have come to own Isaan, but also many well-intentioned people; some who came in the name of those who wanted to help, of those who wanted to develop [the region] by repeating their mantras [for us] to be hard-working, patient, frugal, sufficient, and much more. Eventually, they instructed us to obediently accept the fate that they had offered.

Over and over again, Isaan has risen up in protest but this only seems to have lead to tragedy. If not that, these protests were like entertaining [but meaningless] *Mo Lam* performances that were bitterly performed in the center of power in Bangkok. And we believed that the ruling class could decide the conflicts and solve the [people’s] grievances in fair ways. We hoped that lobbying and pleading would make [the region’s] exploiters soft-hearted and have mercy.

Eventually, we had to roll up our mats and go home defeated, preparing ourselves to solve the problems that occurred again and again. And we kept waiting for various government committees to discuss our problems as they would please.

We lost direction in our struggle. Sometimes we dwell on the glorious past to the point that we forget ourselves, unable to adapt to the changing trends of world today. Some turned to depending on powers outside the system without realizing that they joined hands with groups that shamefully disregarded the rules of democracy. They lead a fight that was not based on an understanding of the changes that had occurred in Isaan and the world. [A fight] that didn’t listen or respect the needs and decisions of the people. [A fight] that also didn’t respect human rights or democracy, [but instead] put its hope on those who hold power.

Today, we come to declare the “New Isaan.” An Isaan that does not accept the exploitation of the abundance of our region and its replacement with bitter pain and sorrow.

First and foremost, we reject any attempts to diminish our legitimacy by accusing us of being part of the political opposition that shamefully seeks political benefits. Those in power [might accuse us] of being an armed group that operates outside the law to incite chaos. However, our fight is based on the fundamental human rights to call for justice and equality.

And even though we chose the name “New Isaan,” we do not stand against the people or groups from other regions. We are only stand against those powers who deprive the people of their legitimate rights.

We are the “New Isaan.” We are rising up from the dryness of the hearts of our exploiters, growing from a single water drop of mutual respect and humanity.

We are declaring that our struggle is about fundamental issues. We are asking for a place to live, land to feed us sufficiently, fair work, health, education, and a good environment, for our communities to govern themselves freely in a democratic and peaceful way.

We will stand firmly by our rights and [vow to] fight against any deceptions and distortions of the truth.

We will build a new Isaan by the hands of the people of this region who have long suffered. Development must come from the people themselves and they will have to decide their own future based on respect for liberty and democracy.

March 20 2015

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