

U.S.-THAI RELATIONS

On March 20, 1833, the United States and Thailand, then Siam, signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, the United States' first treaty with a country in Asia. Since World War II, the United States and Thailand have developed close relations, as reflected in several bilateral treaties and by both countries' participation in UN multilateral activities and agreements. The principal bilateral arrangement is the 1966 Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations, which facilitates U.S. and Thai companies' economic access to one another's markets. Thailand's stability and independence are important to the maintenance of peace in the region. There are a number of international development programs between Thai and U.S. including: health and HIV/AIDS programming; refugee assistance; and trafficking in persons. The U.S. Peace Corps in Thailand has approximately 100 volunteers, focused on primary education, with an integrated program involving teacher training, health education, and environmental education.

Current Issues: Thailand remains a trafficking route for narcotics from the

Golden Triangle--the intersection of Burma, Laos, and Thailand--to both the domestic Thai and international markets. The large-scale production and shipment of opium and heroin shipments from Burma of previous years have largely been replaced by widespread smuggling of methamphetamine tablets, although heroin seizures along the border continue to take place with some frequency. The United States and Thailand work closely together and with the United Nations on a broad range of programs to halt illicit drug trafficking and other criminal activity, such as trafficking in persons. The U.S. supports the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok, which provides counter-narcotics and anti-crime capacity-building programs to law enforcement and judicial officials from a number of regional countries.

Disaster: The December 26, 2004 Asian Tsunami killed more than ten thousand people in Thailand alone. Nearly 500 kilometers of coastline across six provinces were damaged by the powerful waves moving at a speed of a jet plane. Close to 400 villages were damaged. More than 200,000 were suddenly without a means to earn their living. In one day, thousands lost

most of what they had and many loved ones. Despair, grief, shock and fear have gripped the hearts of many Thais until today.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT THAILAND



OFFICIAL NAME: Kingdom of Thailand

LAND OF SMILES

Source: <http://www.maps-thailand.com/>
U.S. Department of State (2009)
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2814.htm>
We Love Thailand 2006 Annual Report
(Unpublished)

PEOPLE

Nationality: Thai.

Population (2007): 65.74 million. (*Data based on Bank of Thailand.*)

Labor force (2007): 36.94 million.

Annual population growth rate (2007 est.): 0.7%.

Ethnic groups: Thai 89%, other 11%.

Religions: Buddhist 94-95%, Muslim 4-5%, Christian, Hindu, Brahmin, other.

Languages: Thai (official language); English is the second language of the elite; regional dialects.

Education: *Years compulsory*--12. *Literacy*--94.9% male, 90.5% female.

Health (2006 est.): *Infant mortality rate*--19.5/1,000. *Life expectancy*--68 years male, 75 years female

GEOGRAPHY

AREA: 513,115 SQ. KM. (198,114 SQ. MI.)

CAPITAL: BANGKOK (POPULATION

9,668,854)

Terrain: Densely populated central plain; northeastern plateau; mountain range in the west; southern isthmus joins the land mass with Malaysia.

Climate: Tropical monsoon.

CHARACTERISTICS

Thailand's population is relatively homogeneous. More than 85% speak a dialect of Thai and share a common culture. This core population includes the central Thai (33.7% of the population, including Bangkok), Northeastern Thai (34.2%), northern Thai (18.8%), and southern Thai (13.3%).

The language of the central Thai population is the language taught in schools and used in government. Several other small Thai-speaking groups include the Shan, Lue, and Phutai.

12% are of significant Chinese heritage, 2.3% are Malay-speaking Muslims of the south. Other groups include the Khmer; the Mon, who are substantially assimilated with the Thai; and the Vietnamese. Smaller mountain-dwelling tribes, such as the Hmong and Mein, as well as the Karen, number about 788,024.

The population is mostly rural, concentrated in the rice-growing areas of the central, northeastern, and northern regions. However, as Thailand continues to industrialize, its urban

population--31.6% of total population, principally in the Bangkok area--is growing.

Thailand's highly successful government-sponsored family planning program has resulted in a dramatic decline in population growth from 3.1% in 1960 to less than 1% today. Life expectancy also has risen, a positive reflection of Thailand's efforts at public health education. However, the AIDS epidemic has had a major impact on the Thai population. Today, over 500,000 Thais live with HIV or AIDS--approximately 1.4% of the adult population. Each year, 25-30,000 Thais die from AIDS-related causes. Ninety percent of them are aged 20-49, the most productive sector of the workforce. The situation could have been worse; an aggressive public education campaign in the early 1990s reduced the number of new HIV infections from over 100,000 annually to around 15,000 annually now.

The constitution mandates 12 years of free education, however, this is not provided universally. Education accounts for 18.0% of total government expenditures.

Theravada Buddhism is the major religion of Thailand and is the religion of about 95% of its people. The government permits religious diversity, and other major religions are represented. Spirit worship and animism are widely practiced.