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# The Heinrich Böll Foundation in Southeast Asia



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# The Heinrich Böll Foundation

The Heinrich Böll Foundation is part of the Green political movement that has developed worldwide as a response to the traditional politics of socialism, liberalism, and conservatism. Our main focus areas are ecology and sustainable development, democracy and human rights, self-determination and justice. We place particular emphasis on gender democracy, meaning social emancipation and equal rights for women and men. We are also committed to equal rights for sexual and ethnic minorities and to the societal and political participation of immigrants. Finally, we promote non-violence and proactive peace policies.

The Foundation is closely linked to the German political party Alliance 90/The Greens. Based in Berlin, it is federally organized and independent from the party. It operates 26 offices worldwide.

To achieve our goals, we seek strategic partnerships with partners worldwide who share our values. We are an independent organization, that is, we determine our own priorities and policies.

**On the international level, we are working on the following issues:**

- democratization and crisis prevention
- climate change and energy policies
- gender politics
- globalization and sustainability
- natural resource management and livelihood preservation

Our namesake, the writer and Nobel Prize laureate Heinrich Böll personifies the values we stand for: freedom, civic courage, tolerance, open debate and the appreciation of art and culture as independent spheres of thought and action.

Throughout his life, Heinrich Böll was a committed supporter of persecuted fellow writers, civil rights activists and political prisoners across all political boundaries.

The name and works of Heinrich Böll are a synonym for the political and social involvement of the citizen, protection and development of civil rights and democratic commitment, as well as civil courage and engagement. The Foundation feels indebted to his courageous and uncompromising civil spirit.

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# Our Current Program Southeast Asia

Our program in Southeast Asia is located in two main areas:

- **Democratization**
- **Ecology & Sustainable Development**

With our **Democratization** Program we intend to make a strategic contribution to participatory democracy and strong citizenship in Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar/Burma by enhancing civil society initiatives, gender democracy and information democracy.

Our **Ecology/Sustainable Development** component promotes sustainable energy governance in Thailand, and civil society participation in debates on policy priorities in the governance of natural resources in Cambodia. With our work, we want to foster ecological and social sustainability in the region and respond to the pressing global challenge of climate change.

We concentrate our efforts on a limited range of issues to achieve even greater impacts. To achieve our goals, we seek strategic partnerships with others who share our values.

## Southeast Asia Internship

The Heinrich Böll Foundation's Internship Program offers insights into the practical aspects of the Chiang Mai office's work as well as administration and planning processes. Interns are working in a multicultural context with a particular focus on Thai culture and society. Advanced students are given the opportunity to work on specific subjects related to their experiences and interests.

The idea is to bring together young people from Europe and Southeast Asia, who are interested in sustainable development, sustainable energy and climate change politics as well as gender democracy. A good working knowledge of English and in addition either German or Thai is required. The duration of the Internship should be at least 3 months, preferably longer. Modest accommodation free of charge is available on the office compound.

For more information or to send your application, please email to [sea@hbfasia.org](mailto:sea@hbfasia.org)

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## Southeast Asia Regional Office Chiang Mai

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The **Southeast Asia Regional Office in Chiang Mai** has operated since February 2000. The establishment of a regional office marked a decision for a strong local presence after the Heinrich Böll Foundation had already initiated a variety of long term cooperations with partner organizations in Southeast Asia in the early 1990s.

Beyond the cooperation with our partners, the office's mandate comprises political analysis, facilitating contacts between people of different backgrounds involved in our main areas of concern, as well as strategic program development and network building.

## Cambodia Country Office Phnom Penh

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Working closely with civil society partners since 1993, the Heinrich Böll Foundation was the first German political foundation to establish co-operation with partners in Cambodia. Building on past achievements, our current program focuses on two areas of importance for the future development of the country: Sustainable Resource Governance and Indigenous Livelihood Rights. Serving as a link between stakeholders from non-governmental and academic organizations, the private sector and government, the **Cambodia Country Office** facilitates dialogue, joint learning and collaborative action.

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## Democratic Change in Myanmar/Burma

In view of both the prevailing complex political, social and humanitarian challenges in Myanmar/Burma and the limited scope of opportunities for meaningful direct engagement with the regime and civil society there, HBF has more recently adopted a rather indirect approach consisting of “small steps” towards the country’s democratic change. The country program rests on the following three pillars:



A **Scholarship Program** that addresses the existing needs for bridging educational disparities between the country and her more prosperous ASEAN neighbours: The Foundation offers young Myanmar scholars three M.A. scholarship programs at two major Thai universities, Chiang Mai and Chulalongkorn, focusing on international development and sustainable development studies or economics, combined with relevant extracurricular activities. Our scholarship program helps to build the intellectual capacity of a small but growing number of Burmese civil society actors. In our carefully designed educational process, the young scholars become inspired to use their expertise and knowledge in such practical fields as journalism and social activism upon return to Myanmar/Burma. The scholarship program also produces a strong alumni network which helps to sustain information exchange among its graduates and fosters a sense of social solidarity and intellectual affinity.

**Alternative Communication and Education Channels:** This initiative emphasizes small-scale social, political and cultural projects, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders from within and outside the country. The Foundation’s local and global collaborations include art & culture projects (e.g. exhibitions, artist in residency co-operations with galleries and art spaces in the Southeast Asian region), new media capacity building initiatives (e.g. documentary film-making workshops), cross-cultural exposure, and the launch of educational/informational website portals for both Burmese and international users, providing country-relevant critical content on historical and current affairs.

**Advocacy for Pro-Engagement:** This third pillar of the Foundation’s Myanmar/Burma program challenges the highly polarized national and international discourses around Myanmar/Burma politics. This initiative contributes to raising the quality of the Burma policy discussions and media coverage, with specific regard to the long-term damages to the potential growth of civil society and liberalization of Myanmar/Burma’s politics and economy which are being brought by the current pro-sanctions and pro-isolationist policy regimes imposed by the West. Furthermore, the Foundation helps to explore more strategic and viable international policy options and collaborates with other international NGOs and think tanks in search of a viable, reality-driven Burma strategy that has at its core the interests of the country’s 54 million people. The Foundation organizes and supports policy and public educational events such as seminars, conferences, round tables in Europe and Southeast Asia, integrating voices and perspectives from within Myanmar/Burma.

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# Energy and Climate Change Thailand

The Heinrich Böll Foundation promotes a sustainable energy policy based on social and gender justice and responsive to our joint climate change responsibility. We believe that a multi-level approach bringing together various key actors and new policies for the generation of renewable energies is crucial for the energy future of Thailand and the Southeast Asian region.

Thailand has a huge potential for renewable energies, mainly lying in biomass, micro-hydro, wind and solar energy. However, with a rapidly growing energy demand, Thailand's dependence on non-sustainable fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil, remains high. Consequently, the increase of renewable energy generation and the introduction of nuclear energy have been discussed as potential solutions. Although increasing energy consumption and a growing awareness of pollution have resulted in some first steps towards a more sustainable energy policy, concrete actions need to follow.

HBF supports reform efforts that aim at overcoming institutional obstacles and push for more transparency in the monopolized energy sector. Equally important, we foster the implementation of innovative ideas from various stakeholders and energy providers to improve energy efficiency on the one hand, and to increase the share of renewable energies in the country's energy mix on the other. Our strategic partners have done impressive work to that end: several reform proposals submitted to the government have been integrated into the country's energy policy. This, for example, resulted in the considerable improvement of the legal framework for small and very small power producers to sell their energy to the grid.

The recent establishment of the Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organization is another step in the right direction. It currently deals with the approval of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects, which the country is showing an increased interest in.

The unfortunate decision to introduce nuclear energy as an alternative and "clean" energy prompted the Foundation to support a Nuclear Monitoring Network of diverse partners and stakeholders. It monitors policy developments and educates the public about involved risks and side effects, thereby demystifying nuclear power for the Thai people. Knowledge and information management constitutes a priority in our advocacy work regarding energy and climate change policy. Although the complex problems related to climate change are increasingly recognized and publicized in Thailand, more information on global warming, its impacts and measures how to reduce harmful emissions in daily life need to be made accessible to the public. Here, HBF contributes with various activities such as publications and a website including an interactive blog on Thai climate change policies and politics, [www.thaiclimate.org](http://www.thaiclimate.org)

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# Gender Democracy Cambodia

As for other countries in Southeast Asia, the participation of Cambodian women both in political institutions as well as in non-formal bodies of political representation is limited. This male bias merges with a rural-urban divide that creates immense disadvantages for women in rural areas, who constitute the majority of the population.

Therefore the Cambodia gender program is formulated around two main objectives:

- Contribute to the development of a gender discourse at the national level, in order to drive initiatives and shape a genuine national gender democracy perspective. This involves developing new research approaches in order to reveal gender biases and create a critical perspective.
- Support rural women's participation in politics through the development of grassroots forms of representation, and increase their capacity to push their own agenda for emancipation and improvement.

The Cambodia program aims at highlighting the intersection of gender with:

- ethnicity, as the target areas for rural women's political participation in the Northeast of Cambodia are inhabited by several different indigenous groups;
- environment, as women are the primary actors in agriculture and play a key role in the management of natural resources.

Although the international donor community has imported gender concepts and terminology, most of them are not very compatible with local contexts. Thus pioneering work to foster the dialogue between various societal groups and stakeholders is required. The Cambodia office uses alternative media formats such as film and radio in addition to the usual dialogue methods to expand the debate, provoke with new perspectives and integrate new, young activists.

### Contact:

Katrin Seidel / [katrin.seidel@hbfasia.org](mailto:katrin.seidel@hbfasia.org) / Prak Kim Baureksmey / [bau@hbfasia.org](mailto:bau@hbfasia.org) / (+855) 23 210 535

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## Gender Democracy Southeast Asia

Our vision in the realm of gender politics is to achieve gender democracy. It is normatively defined as a system of gender relations free of dependence and dominance. It is not about equalizing the differences between men and women but about equal rights and equal opportunities for different persons with different needs. This includes respect of gender and sexual minorities. For HBF, gender democracy is a guiding political principle, a social vision, and an organizational directive all at once. It must be an integral part of every democracy worth its name – there is no democracy without gender democracy. To that end, we have made the systematic integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of our work and that of our partners a cross-cutting task.

In Southeast Asia, we are faced with very different challenges in the respective countries of the region. These include a bias in male and female participation in civil society and policy formulation processes, a lack of women's participation in political institutions and, particularly in Cambodia and Myanmar/Burma, no equal access for women and men to education and economic resources. Gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles still dominate, albeit to varying degrees, the relations between men and women. Herein lies the main challenge for the Foundation's work. Responding to these realities, our gender program includes women's empowerment as well as a gender-inclusive call to women and men to take on responsibility for a more gender-just society.

In **Thailand**, we want to create new spaces for exchange and constructive dialogue, bring together representatives of various groups and sexual identities, and identify currently relevant topics, conflicts and stereotypes. Particular attention is paid to bridging the gap between the established, rather hierarchical feminist movement and the young generation of women activists who raise new issues but still lack efficient networks. Our core objectives are to diminish these barriers as well as to integrate the interests and concerns of the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender community into a more inclusive movement by means of open discussions.

Another major challenge is to include and actively engage heterosexual men in the public gender debate. If they can overcome prevailing convictions, the door to more equal and fair gender relations is open.



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# Media for Democracy Thailand

The media's role in public opinion formation is of particular importance. Our media program aims at information democracy, meaning people's opportunity to select from a diverse range of non-monopolized information services according to their needs and choice. Free access to information, involvement in public media and independent opinion formation are preconditions to people's participation in democratic decision-making processes.

In 2007, Thailand was listed as one of the "top 10 backsliders" in the global press freedom and the country also takes a back-seat (135 of 169) in the 2008 ranking of the Annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index. Reasons for such bad ratings are the numerous legal provisions restricting the access to independent information and allowing the government to censor contents that are "dangerous, immoral or insulting the monarchy" or restrictions in the name of national security. Especially internet providers and users have been affected, while the mainstream media has been practicing self-censorship for years. The recent closure of several community radio stations and websites have further contributed to the country's negative media image.

The main focal points of our media program are the continuous support of our cooperation partners in the dynamic media reform discussions on the national level on the one hand, and the strengthening and expansion of regional and local community radio networks on the other. To this end, we are cooperating with media professionals, NGOs, academics, advocacy groups, state and private educational institutes, and community radio stations and networks. The broadcasting media are of primary interest since they reach the largest audiences countrywide. They are also an important forum for negotiating societal norms and values, including those affecting gender relations. Hence the Foundation is supporting efforts in the media sector that tackle gender discrimination and inequality.

The current discourse on the legal framework for community radio stations constitutes a relevant context for the work of the Foundation. Thailand has more than 2,000 licensed stations that have operated in a legal vacuum ever since the coup in 2006. They are presently undergoing a transformation process and experimenting with various models within an unclear set of definitions. A recent cooperation project of HBF and community radio networks has produced a baseline study assessing the situation of community radio stations and outlining the requirements for their ensured operation. The results determine our future activities in this area.

Although the current constitution contains provisions that can potentially strengthen free media, the road to an ensured information democracy is long and rocky. The media reform debate as promoted by partners of HBF and academics is very new, complex and abstract to many Thais. Therefore, continued public forums and discussions fostering understanding and enlisting public support are necessary to ensure an ongoing reform debate on the national level. New alliances between bloggers, web masters and film makers, who are all subjected to stricter control and censorship mechanisms, are growing more and more important in the public sphere. Thus, in addition to the promotion of a strong network of media reform advocates monitoring existing and formulating alternative media policies, the Foundation will be more actively involved in this new virtual space.

<sup>1</sup> [www.cpj.backsliders/index.html](http://www.cpj.backsliders/index.html).

<sup>2</sup> [www.rsfor/article.php3?id\\_article=24025](http://www.rsfor/article.php3?id_article=24025).

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# Sustainable Development Cambodia

After decades of conflict and violence, Cambodia has entered the 21st century as a politically stable country with strong and sustained economic growth. The country's future path towards sustainable social and economic development, however, will principally depend on present day decisions on the use and management of its natural resource wealth.

Cambodia's natural resource sector can only become a force for sustainable development if natural resources are managed in a way that minimizes social and environmental impacts. Benefits and costs must be shared fairly and decisions made in a transparent, accountable and participatory manner.

The Cambodia Program of the Heinrich Böll Foundation aims at empowering local civil society actors to contribute effectively to debates on policy priorities in the governance of natural resources. The HBF Cambodia Office is seeking strategic partnerships and initiates research and capacity building projects to inform and foster stakeholder dialogue at a local, national and regional level.

Particular attention is given to the situation of Cambodia's indigenous communities whose social and cultural survival depends upon the integrity of their lands and territories, and continued access to the natural resources to sustain their traditional livelihoods. The HBF Cambodia Office works in partnership with local non-governmental and academic organisations, indigenous associations and regional networks to empower female and male indigenous leaders and their communities to defend their livelihood rights and pursue self-determined development.

### Contact:

Katrin Seidel / [katrin.seidel@hbfasia.org](mailto:katrin.seidel@hbfasia.org) / Phoung Pich Ponreay / [ponreay@hbfasia.org](mailto:ponreay@hbfasia.org) / (+855) 23 210 535

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## Office Chiang Mai

Heinrich Böll Foundation  
Southeast Asia Regional Office

91/9 Mu 14, Ban Mai Lang Mor, Soi 1  
Suthep Road, Chiang Mai 50200  
Thailand

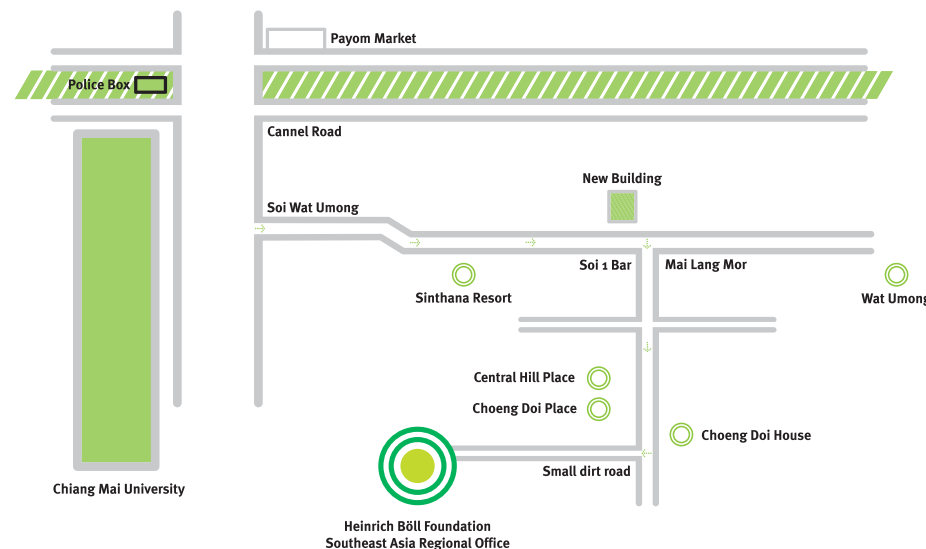
**Mailing address:**

P.O.Box 119  
Chiang Mai University Post Office  
Chiang Mai 50202  
Thailand

**Phone:** (+66) 53 810 430/1/2

**Fax:** (+66) 53 810 124

**email:** sea@hbfasia.org



## Office Phnom Penh

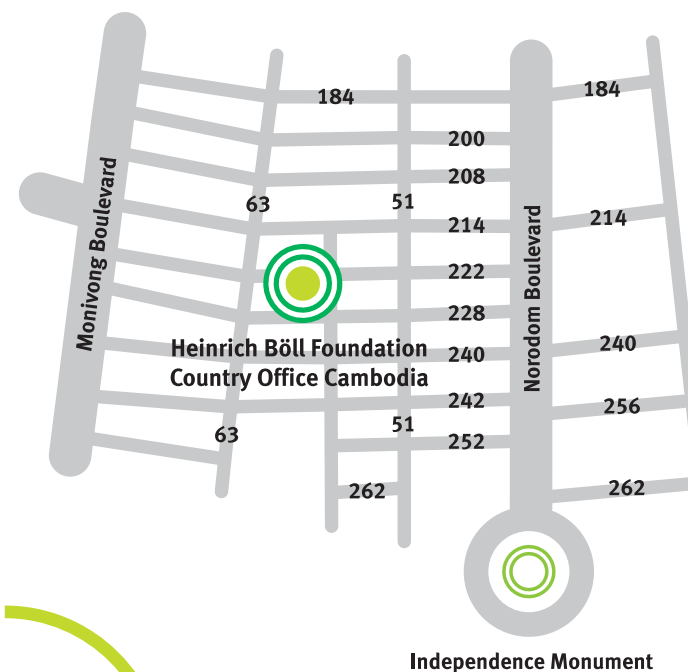
Heinrich Böll Foundation  
Country Office Cambodia

#34, Street 222  
Sangkat Boeung Raing  
Khan Daun Penh  
P.O. Box 1436  
Phnom Penh  
Cambodia

**Phone:** (+855) 23 210 535

**Fax:** (+855) 23 216 482

**email:** phnompenh@hbfasia.org



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