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## PRESS RELEASE

### **USAID LAUNCHES FIVE-YEAR, \$30-MILLION PROGRAM IN THAILAND TO PROMOTE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND RECONCILIATION**

**BANGKOK** – The U.S. Government today launched a five-year, \$30-million (Bt960 million) program to foster civil society engagement in Thailand.

The program, managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development's Regional Development Mission for Asia (USAID/RDMA), will enhance the role of civil society organizations (CSOs), encourage constructive dialogue and consensus building, and promote peace and reconciliation in Thailand. It will help CSOs work with the Royal Thai Government to collaborate on participatory democracy and increase citizens' role in their own governance.

"Through this program, the U.S. Government will support the people of Thailand's efforts to resolve the challenges facing their country," said U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Eric G. John. "The United States Government's program will support community organizations rather than political parties or political factions, and will work closely with these groups and Thai government agencies to address key governance challenges, including the peaceful resolution of conflicts, throughout the country."

USAID's implementing partner for this program is Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI), an international firm specializing in development solutions for democratic governance, public sector management, and crisis mitigation and recovery. DAI is based in Washington, D.C. with an office in Bangkok to oversee this activity.

The new Thailand civil society engagement program, one of many USAID projects in Thailand, follows extensive consultation with key Thai stakeholders including, academics, civil society, Thai government officials, and others. It seeks to strengthen and formalize the role of community organizations, facilitate constructive public dialogue to support consensus building, and promote civic reconciliation activities in Thailand.

The program's three primary objectives are:

- To enhance the capacity of independent agencies to provide government oversight and promote linkages with issue-based community organizations;
- To strengthen the capacity of Thai community organizations and the media to serve as checks and balances for political processes and public policy; and
- To support civic reconciliation efforts.

USAID and DAI will work closely with Thai citizens and civil society organizations, drawing on Thai expertise, to implement this activity. The program's resources will focus on civil society, the media,

and independent agencies of the government. Funding will go to groups working with the Royal Thai Government rather than directly to the government.

USAID has been operating in Thailand for more than half a century. It opened in 1950 and contributed more than \$1.1 billion to the country's development before closing in 1996 when numerous bilateral missions were closed in nations that had achieved substantial economic development. USAID reopened in Bangkok in 2003 as the Regional Development Mission for Asia, and today its programs amount to \$120 million annually in 22 Asian countries.

In addition to citizen engagement and reconciliation, USAID's programs in Thailand involve extensive work in health, environment, governance, and vulnerable populations. USAID combats illegal wildlife trade, promotes sustainable management of natural resources and responsible timber trade, provides access to clean water and sanitation, strengthens environmental law enforcement, and promotes clean energy technologies. USAID offers technical support to Thai NGOs and USG partners to prevent HIV/AIDS and helps those who are infected. USAID provides malaria, tuberculosis, avian influenza and dengue surveillance, prevention and control. USAID is raising awareness among Thailand's youth about the risks of being trafficked.

USAID's programs in Thailand and throughout Asia mirror a change in all USAID's programs which have moved away from infrastructure development to engage a wide range of participants on socio-economic issues that affect their lives, including global warming, sustainable management of natural resources, disaster assistance, conquering disease, governance reform, reconciliation, and connecting people in constructive ways to affect change.

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