

Press release

Legal cases and latest situation regarding Dhammakaya Temple

1. Legal cases against Dhammajayo

1.1 Embezzlement cases (began in 1998) – Dhammajayo and devotees of Dhammakaya Temple were indicted on charges of embezzling assets and land belonging to the temple. However, the Attorney General then withdrew the case after Dhammajayo returned the land to the temple.

1.2 Money laundering cases – The Department of Special Investigation (DSI) found that between 2009 – 2011, Dhammakaya Temple and its network accepted, without prior obligations, 21 cheques totaling 1,205,160,000 baht from Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative. DSI then summoned Dhammajayo as one of the suspects of money laundering and accepting stolen properties but Dhammajayo had thrice failed to comply with these orders. On 17 May 2016, the Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Dhammajayo based on the said accusations.

1.3 Forest encroachment cases – Provincial Courts of Loei, Nakhonratchasima and Phang Nga provinces have issued arrest warrants for Dhammajayo on charges of encroaching National Reserved Forest in the three provinces.

2. Revocation of DMC's Broadcasting License

The Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) suspended Dhammakaya Media Channel's (DMC) broadcasting license for a duration of 30 days starting from 8 December 2016 as the channel was broadcasting messages calling on the people to assemble and potentially inviting for the blockade of entry by officials who are performing their duties which may lead to confrontation. After the 30-day suspension the commission reached the decision to revoke DMC's broadcasting license as there is reason to believe that DMC will broadcast content aimed at creating confusion and inciting divisiveness, thereby posing a threat to national security.

3. Dhammakaya Temple Assets

3.1 The main temple compound located in Klong Luang district, Pathum Thani covers an area of over 2000 Rai (3.2 million square metres). The overall

construction costs involved in various buildings within the temple compound was as high as 350 billion baht. The temple states that this vast sum of money was a result of sheer faith of the temple devotees.

3.2 Prominent buildings in the temple compound include:

- The Ubosot of Dhammakaya Temple – The building accommodates up to 200 monks and novices. Its construction cost was as high as 370 million baht.

- The Dhammakaya Cetiya (Dhammakaya Pagoda) – The building consists of 300,000 Buddha statues on the outside and 700,000 more inside, all of which are gold-coated. Staircases are made from high-quality granite. The construction cost of the Cetiya was as high as 75 billion baht.

- The “Master Nun Chandra Khonnokyoong 100th anniversary building” – The building was built in commemoration of Master Nun Chandra Khonnokyoong, the founder of Dhammakaya Temple. The cost of construction of this building was more than 3 billion baht, of which 714 million baht was alleged to have been paid by a cheque from Mr. Supachai Srisupaaksorn, the former president of Khlong Chan Credit Union Cooperative to Dhammajayo.

- It is alleged that Dhammakaya Temple owns more than 50,000 Rai (80 million square metres) of land in 77 provinces across the country. These do not include a massive amount of assets owned by Dhammakaya Temple abroad.

4. Sequence of Events

4.1 On 16 June 2016 officers of the Department of Special Investigation and the police arrived at Dhammakaya Temple with a search warrant but were blocked from entering the temple by a group of masked individuals who had set up barricades to obstruct the performance of official duties and negotiations by DSI officers were not met with cooperation. The officers had to abort the mission as it had been assessed that further tensions may arise as a result of incitement by a third party, leading to potential confrontation that may affect innocent civilians. During 13 – 16 December 2016 officers were obstructed from performing their duties in a similar manner that took place on 16 June 2016.

4.2 Latest Update during February 15-20, 2017

On 15 February 2017

- the Head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) issued Order No. 5/2560 (2017) on measures regarding the authorization of designated control areas (no-entry zone), namely Dhammakaya Temple and its vicinities, to improve efficiency in carrying out law enforcement.

On 19 February 2017

- Non-resident monks and laymen and laywomen were asked to leave the Temple by 15.00 hrs. In the afternoon monks and followers broke through barricades to enter Dhammakaya Temple. Throughout the day there has been continued campaign on social media to mobilize thousands of supporters and local community to gather at the temple within 48 hours to oppose the NCPO Order under Section 44 of the interim Constitution in order to suspend the Government action.

-At 17.00 hrs., police officers arrived at Gates 5 and 6 of the Dhammakaya Temple to prepare to control the area. About 1,000 monks and civilians were seated praying behind the steel barrier separating Gates 5 – 6. All of them have face masks hiding their features.

- At 17.45 hrs., the Deputy Police Commissioner of Provincial Police Region 1 arrived at Gates 5-6 to personally take command as police officers approached the Gates with loudspeaker vehicles. The police then closed in on Gates 5 – 6 at around 17.50 hrs., with Dhammakaya devotees shouting at them.

- By 18.15 hrs., less than 50 meters separate the police and Dhammakaya devotees, which appeared alert for any action and wore raincoats in case the police move in to control the area. DSI officials played the song “Lord Buddha, the World’s Prophet” over loudspeakers to the devotees obstructing authorities and referred to the teachings of the Lord Buddha to encourage restraint. On the Dhammakaya side, broadcasts were made over loudspeakers to incite the devotees to resist the authorities who are coming to destroy Buddhism and the monkhood. The situation became very tense. Dhammakaya devotees, men and women, moved to the Gates to form a human shield directly facing the police. Behind them, a large gathering of monks stood at the ready.

20 February 2017

- Around 8 a.m. there was a minor chaos at the entrance of the Temple due to attempts to walk through the barricade by approximately 500 monks and followers. The situation has now been under control and the stand-off continued.

5. The Government's Perspective

Relevant agencies will carry out their duties in a prudent and well-considered manner, in line with legal procedures and in accordance with international practices so as to maintain law and order in the country. The NCPO order on 15 February 2017 aims to put in place appropriate measures to control certain areas to enable the relevant authorities in searching and bringing those with warrants to justice. It also aims to ensure utmost protection to the lives and properties of innocent people in the designated control areas. Relevant measures will be in place for only a temporary period and enforced proportionately with the situation.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha today advised the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) to be highly cautioned and to exercise restraints while undertaking enforcement measures towards Dhammakaya Temple. He also urged all the people and monks involved to give cooperation to the authorities who duly performed their duties to keep peace and public order in the society.

As of 20 February 2017