

Academics called for temporary suspension of FTA talks with US

BANGKOK, Nov 13 (TNA) - Thai academics called on the government on Friday to temporarily suspend ongoing free trade area (FTA) negotiations with the United States, and suggested it to identify impacts on the country's intellectual property rights and agricultural products.

Mr. Jakkrit Kuanpoj, a lecturer from Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, told a seminar entitled "Globalized FTA and Human Rights" that the government has eyed only the advantages from the FTA, and has failed to keep the public informed about potential impacts.

"I want to request the government not to continue the FTA negotiations with the US until it has studied the impacts, especially on the intellectual property rights. It needs to inform the public about the disadvantages the FTA would bring onto their livelihood. Thailand should learn from Chile and some South American countries," he said.

The academic said if Thailand entered into a FTA agreement with the US, Thai farmers would suffer from seeds monopoly by American companies, as they would not be allowed to keep their own seeds after a harvest for the next growing season.

"And when we open our market to the US products, we could not control food safety, especially when it comes to the genetic modified (GM) food products," said Mr. Jakkrit.

The academic also warned that the FTA with the US might worsen the country's access to drugs, the right that developing countries have negotiated hard for during multilateral trade talks of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

He said the government should study the way the Australian government moved on proposals before it concluded its FTA agreement with Thailand.

The study is necessary in the sense that the Thai government could propose conditions for the benefit of Thailand during negotiations with the US, and the talks must be based on equality, he suggested.

"There is no need for Thailand to open a free trade talk with the US because the US has far bigger economy and political power. It is not an equal talk and Thailand would stand to lose in all aspects. The country's governments in the past had tried to avoid a bilateral trade talk with the US by joining WTO for multilateral free trade talks, but now we are abandoning it," he said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sane Jamarik, the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, supported the academic's call, saying the government's ongoing FTA talks with the US would affect the livelihood of rural Thais.

"The ongoing FTA talk with Washington is not a real trade talk but a technology colonization which would affect the basic rights of the general public. Thailand has got rich natural resources and biodiversity whose intellectual property rights need protection," he said. (TNA)--E110, E111