

ASSOCIATION DES SECRETAIRES
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GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

CONTRIBUTION

by

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to the General Debate on

“What measures have been put in place to mitigate the risk of a future event preventing your parliament from sitting?”

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In recent times, many countries around the world, including Thailand, have encountered economic crises, political problems, climate change, and the rapid development of technology. These are all significant factors that cause problems and changes to occur rapidly and with complexity, whether there are events arising from natural disasters that have caused severe damage to the lives and resources of the country, the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted and necessitated changes in lifestyles and work globally, or even events caused by human actions, such as recent protests against governments or parliaments in various countries, which have included the burning and destruction of property within parliamentary buildings. Such incidents have caused damage and severely affected all sectors, including the economy, society, security, as well as the country's image and the operations of government agencies.

The "Parliament" is an important place in the country, a symbol of the exercise of sovereign power. It is the main institution that enacts laws, scrutinizes the administration of state affairs, and the place that reflects the demands of the people. The Parliament is therefore a place where people gather to demonstrate symbolically or organize political activities to make demands on the government. The aforementioned problems reflect that without good preventive and risk management measures, it could affect the duties of the legislative branch, preventing it from operating normally. Furthermore, government services must adapt and prepare to handle such situations or prevent the impacts of such changes. The Secretariat of the Senate is an organization that supports the legislative work of Thailand. It has the duties to support the operations of senators in the process of considering and scrutinizing laws, monitoring of the administration of state affairs, and considering persons to hold positions as stipulated by the Constitution or laws.

Therefore, the Secretariat of the Senate of Thailand has recognized and seen the importance of adapting and preparing for situations that might prevent the organization from holding the sittings of the Senate to perform its duties of considering and scrutinizing laws, which led to the development of the Emergency Response Plan and The Business Continuity Plan (BCP) to serve as guidelines for responding and operating in various crisis or emergency situations, either caused by natural disasters or human actions, and to prepare for emergencies that may arise and cause a halt to the operations of the legislative branch, rendering it unable to perform the roles and duties of the Senate as usual, which would cause severe damage to the country.

The creation of the Senate's special event management plan is to prepare procedures to handle disasters and emergency situations, and to prevent damage or impacts that may occur to the Senate's process management, as well as to reduce the impact and severity that could cause loss of life and property. There is a Parliament Emergency Management Commission responsible for managing emergency situations, planning, and giving orders during critical emergencies such as riots, protests, fires, etc. There are also external agencies with safety duties and responsibilities to provide support and assistance, such as the Royal Thai Police, the Royal Thai Navy, the Marine Department, emergency medical units, etc. Moreover, the Secretariat of the Senate has placed importance on continuity management to prevent and reduce impacts that would cause the legislative branch to halt its operations or be unable to perform the roles and duties of the Senate in accordance with the law, and has set up a Commission on implementing the crisis readiness plan of the Secretariat of the

Senate (BC Team). The composition of the Commission includes the Secretary-General of the Senate, as the head of the government agency, and high-level executives of the agency, who are responsible for considering, planning, and ordering the agency to be able to drive and support the Senate's operations continuously. It also includes relevant officials from various departments who are a key mechanism in driving the Senate forward to be able to perform its duties according to the provisions of the constitution and the timeframe prescribed by law, continuously without interruption and without affecting the country's administration.

In considering the impacts of critical emergencies and the necessary resources for holding Senate sittings to ensure the continuous performance of the Senate's duties, the Secretariat of the Senate has measures and procedures to prevent or reduce risks and impacts, taking into account the important resources for supporting Senate sittings, which consist of:

1. Preparation of venues for the sittings. This considers whether the main workplace is usable or not, as a result of the critical emergency. If the main workplace is damaged and unusable, or if using it would be unsafe for senators, senators and staffs must be moved to work at an alternative workplace designated in the response plan to ensure safety and the ability to conduct meetings continuously without interruption.

2. Personnel readiness. This considers whether the agency's personnel can come to work as usual due to the critical emergency. If affected by such a crisis, the Secretariat of the Senate will consider modifying work processes and preparing essential personnel to perform duties at the alternative workplace. For personnel who cannot work at the alternative workplace or are not core staff for the Senate sitting process, executives can assign them to work from home or a convenient location, with support for systems and tools for work.

3. Information technology systems and important data. This considers whether information technology systems or important data are usable as a result of the critical emergency. If they cannot be used normally, the Secretariat of the Senate has prepared a ready-to-use backup database and, for important data not connected to the network system, uses data backup via the agency's V Cloud system.

The Secretariat of the Senate recognizes that establishing measures and procedures to prepare for and prevent incidents affecting Senate sittings is crucial to enabling the agency to handle unexpected emergencies. However, for such measures or guidelines to be effective, there must be regular training of the measures or operational guidelines to ensure that executives and relevant personnel can perform their duties correctly. Therefore, the Secretariat of the Senate has arranged training and drills for the special event response plan for senators, executives, and personnel at least once a year, such as fire response plan drills, riot response plan drills, testing of the parliament building's security technology systems, etc. These are conducted in collaboration with specialized agencies to ensure readiness and the ability to act correctly according to the established guidelines and measures.

In addition, the Secretariat of the Senate also places importance on building confidence in the organization's continuity management to meet the international standard for business continuity management, ISO 22301. It requested an assessment from an external assessment body according to this standard, resulting in the Secretariat of the Senate achieving ISO 22301:2019 certification for its Senate sitting process.

From the foregoing, the inability of the legislative branch to conduct parliamentary proceedings is a significant problem that affects the country's public administration process in many aspects, including enacting laws, budget approval, and the scrutiny of the executive branch's work. The continuity of the legislative branch's operations is therefore extremely important, because even a short interruption can cause damage to the economy, public administration, and public confidence. Measures to reduce risks from critical emergencies that result in the inability to conduct parliamentary proceedings are a matter that the legislatures of all countries should give great importance to. Furthermore, for such risk mitigation measures to be efficient and effective, the legislative branch must place the importance on training, drills, and reviewing the measures to ensure they are clear and practical. The pre-establishment of measures and guidelines and comprehensive risk reduction are therefore essential for the legislature to be able to perform its duties continuously and strongly, and it is considered a way to protect the symbol of democratic principles for its sustainability.