

GOVERNANCE

Independent people's council mooted to bring in changes

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Scholars have unveiled a new proposal to set up a "socio-political reform council" to solve conflicts dogging the country and help draft a new constitution to replace the 2007 coup-engineered version.

Independent scholar Winai Setboonsang, who presented the proposal yesterday at a seminar held by the Thai Journalists Association, suggested that the Abhisit Vejjajiva government use the general election scheduled for this year as an opportunity to launch the council.

The state's appointment of panels to work on national reconciliation following the mayhem that grew from the red shirt rallies last year is a good initiative, but the bodies lack "a sense of the sanctity of mediators" despite all the good people serving on them, Mr Winai said.

It was not enough to rely on these

panels alone. A new council was needed whose members would be elected directly by people countrywide to serve as mediators to settle social and political conflicts.

The council, made up of 200 members, would gather ideas from the public at large as well as government-appointed panels.

These ideas would be examined jointly by the council and other parties in order to form the basis of a new constitution.

A referendum would then be held to see whether the public accepted the new constitution. If most did not, then legislators would possibly look into amending the 2007 version.

Mr Winai's proposal is based on research he carried out on ways to put the conflicts caused by the yellow and red shirt groups behind the kingdom.

He has worked on the project with experts from Mahidol University, the

semi-independent Political Development Council and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, a German-based democracy advocate group.

Thammasat University vice-rector Prinya Tevanaruemitrkul supported the idea of setting up a council to draft a new constitution.

Thailand needs to solve its problems under the rule of law.

"If we quarrel, we have to quarrel under the law," Mr Prinya said.

"Thailand must eventually choose the democratic way. This research shows any non-democratic approaches will certainly lead to problems."

Former justice minister and red shirt supporter Pongthep Thepkanchana supported Mr Winai's idea, but suggested the council be made up of 100 representatives from the public and 20 experts nominated by organisations and elected by the people.