

 Mon, 20th July - PHUKET: Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva defended the creation of the Asean human rights body, widely criticised as ♦toothless♦ by certain quarters, describing it as an important first step.

Abhisit said Asean (the Association of South-East Asian Nations) had to make a start first with the ultimate objective to make it a credible, realistic and evolutionary body.

The body is a good sign, the leaders will look at it in October. It has the twin purpose of promoting and protecting human rights, ♦ Abhisit told a press conference after opening the 42nd Asean Ministerial Meeting here Monday.

Asked if Thailand would allow members of the body to visit the kingdom should there be allegations of human rights abuse, Abhisit said the Thai government had always been open on such matters.

We already have an independent human rights commission. A lot of rights groups are already operating here.

They submit reports, and my government takes every report seriously. We see them as helping us in protecting our people, ♦ he added.

Asean has proposed to name its human rights body the Asean Inter Governmental Commission of Human Rights, which is expected to be endorsed by the grouping♦s leaders at their summit in Thailand.