



**UNESCO Bangkok
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education**

Regional Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific
Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific
Advisor for Communication and Information in Asia
Regional Advisor for the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
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联合国教育、
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PRESS RELEASE

British Ambassador, Thai and international experts to take centre stage at FCCT/UNESCO panel on the impact of legal status on Hill Tribes

• *“Without I.D. Cards, the only choices for our children are to beg, sell drugs or sell their bodies – they are without hope.”* - Akha grandmother in Sripingmuang Akha slum community, Chiang Mai.

Bangkok, 9 June, 2008 - Without legal status, ethnic minority people are considered “illegal aliens” in their own country. They are subject to arrest, deportation, extortion and other forms of abuse, and denied their basic human rights: the right to vote; the right to own land and the right to medical care.

To address this issue, an interactive dialogue involving leading experts in Thailand on the legal status of Hill Tribe people will be held at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand on Monday, June 16.

UNESCO has identified the “lack of citizenship” as the greatest risk factor for highland girls and women in Thailand to be trafficked, or otherwise exploited. Consequently, UNESCO in cooperation with the British Embassy initiated the Highland Birth and Citizenship Registration Promotion Project. The project is funded by the United Kingdom Sustainable Development Programme Fund.

The programme aims to promote legal status and universal birth registration among highland communities – a problem that has plagued Hill Tribes for decades.

The upcoming panel discussion coincides with the conclusion of the current phase of the project and His Excellency Quinton Quayle, British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic, will open the event with introductory remarks on the significance of the programme and its implications in Thailand.

Forty-five years ago, a UNESCO-funded anthropologist conducted the first analysis of hill tribe issues for the Thai government's Public Welfare Department. His prediction of two key problems – lack of citizenship and a lack of land tenure – sadly rings true nearly half a century later.

Despite an admirable Thai government policy commitment to universal access to primary education, a survey by UNESCO and the Thai Government of nearly 64,000 highland people in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son found that without citizenship, hill tribe people had a significantly lower chance of entering primary school. Access to medical care revealed even greater disparities.

The panel will explore the implications of the current situation for the cultural and physical survival of hill tribes, as well as examine the new amendment to the nationality law, which aims to remedy past deficiencies.

The speakers are:

Mrs. Tuenjai Deetes, a former Senator, who is currently Secretary-General of the Hill Area and Community Development Foundation. Khun Tuenjai has been a long-time advocate for the rights of hill tribe people.

Ms. Chutima Morlaekul (Miju), an Akha herself, is an expert on legal status and minority rights. KhunMiju has conducted valuable research for the UNESCO Highland Citizenship Project.

Mr. Karn Sermchaiwong, is a veteran lawyer who has worked on minority issues. He is also a committee member of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and specialises in minority and displaced persons.

Dr. David A. Feingold is the International Coordinator for HIV and Trafficking Programmes, Office of the Regional Advisor for Culture, UNESCO. Dr Feingold is a research anthropologist and filmmaker, who has conducted extensive field research in South East Asia over four decades, particularly among the Akha and Shan people.

Ms. Amanda Flaim is a PhD candidate in Development Sociology at Cornell University and a statistical analyst for UNESCO.. She has been working on the Highland Citizenship project with Dr Feingold since 2005.

Event Details:

Date: 16 June 2008, Time: 8pm

Refreshments : 7pm

Venue: The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand Penthouse, Maneeya Center, 518/5 Ploenchit Road, (connected to the BTS Skytrain Chitlom Station) Patumwan, Bangkok, 10330.

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