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Presented by Mr. Phuchphop Mongkolnarin

Draft Statement by the Thai delegation in reply to the statement made by Mr. Matthew McDaniel, the Akha Heritage Foundation

Madam Chairperson,

My delegation is taking the floor to set the record straight in regard to the allegations raised in the statement by the representative of the Akha Heritage Foundation concerning to the situation of the Akha hilltribes in Thailand.

*the merit and the items of the meeting* promote dialogue and better understanding

Bearing in mind ~~that~~ the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues should be used constructively, ~~we feel that any statement made in this important forum should aim at promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of the indigenous peoples as well as minorities.~~ Unsubstantiated allegations should ~~thus~~ be refrained, *may*

~~On the seizure of farmland of the Akha in the Mae Fah Luang District in Chiangrai Province~~ *reference* ~~the delegation finds~~ *that reference made on Akha's farmland in Chiangrai Province* ~~the allegation a complete reversal of truth.~~ I wish to point out that the land in Mae Fah Luang ~~District~~ *is true station* is inhabited by over 80,000 various hilltribe people including the Akha. Traditionally these people engaged in slash-and-burn farming, growing opium, and forest encroachment, which resulted in a massive deforestation. Royally sponsored agricultural development projects, therefore, have been established in the said area with the aim to ~~revitalizing the ecological system as well as to~~ *provide better economic opportunity to the people in the* ~~enhancing the quality of life of various hilltribes.~~ The Highland Agricultural Development Center has been created in the area with the objectives of 1) employing the local Akha people so that they will gain the knowledge of various agricultural activities and apply them to their own lands; 2) increasing their incomes;

and 3) raising environmental conservation awareness. Prior to initiating such project, the Thai authorities concerned consulted the Akha community leaders and villagers and explained to them about the project. <sup>understood</sup> The people in the area therefore <sup>well</sup> <sup>render</sup> ~~have a full understanding and cooperation to~~ <sup>understand the project well and render their full coop</sup> ~~close~~ <sup>cooperate</sup> with the Government agencies concerned. Some local Akha even donated some of their own lands to be part of the project, <sup>The project</sup> ~~which~~ <sup>will</sup> prove to be successful in increasing <sup>their</sup> ~~the people's~~ income as well as discouraging them from involving with drugs ~~crop or drug related activities.~~

~~On the alleged human trafficking and sexual exploitation of the Akha, I wish to stress that the Thai Government considers the problem of human trafficking as one of our top priorities. Anyone who is familiar with this problem in the Southeast Asian region would recognize the tremendous efforts made by the Thai Government in cooperation with our neighbouring countries in this regard. We are also working closely with the civil society and UN agencies to address this problem across borders. To allege that the Government ignores and tolerates the situation of human trafficking simply denies the true fact.~~

~~delete~~

~~My delegation could not respond to other grave allegations not directly addressed to us without any supporting fact. Should concrete facts or evidence to that respect be provided, my delegation will be ready to convey them to authorities concerned. Please rest assured that the Government of Thailand is fully committed to ensure that our children,~~ <sup>in Thailand</sup> ~~regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or cultural background be protected and live with full dignity,~~ <sup>all people</sup>

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.