

UNPFII April 2010 9th Session Culture and Identity
The Akha Heritage Foundation
The Human Rights Situation of the Akha people in Thailand

Chairperson:

My name is Matthew McDaniel. I and Michu have come to the UN Permanent Forum many times, and also to the Working Group in Geneva in order to speak up for the rights of the Akha people.

Since 2004 we have seen little dialogue with the Thai Government and little change in the situation of the Akha people in Thailand.

1.

In 2008 the Akha case came to the attention of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous people.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/category,COI,,,THA,4a66d9a3c,0.html>

I quote from the UNHCR Website:

“In August 2008 the UN Special Rapporteur highlighted the case of the Akha indigenous people in Chiangrai province, whose land was allegedly seized in 2003 as a result of the Highland Development Station Project. The objective of the station was purportedly to serve as a 'centre of knowledge on agriculture for the hill tribe people'. The Akha claim that the project has left them with only a few small plots around the village, and they have lost their traditional livelihoods. The land seizure was reportedly accompanied by widespread harassment of Akha villagers by members of the military and forestry personnel. Villagers say they were not consulted, nor did they consent to the project, and they have not yet been compensated for their loss. The government has so far not responded to the concerns raised by the Special Rapporteur.”

The Highland Development Station Project is a Royal Project of the Queen of Thailand. If we are to visit the website today for this project we will find that it is no longer on the internet. It has been pulled down.

http://www.chaipat.or.th/chaipat/journal/aug03/hill_e.html

2. Our second concern is that the Akha of Thailand are not given ID cards for a large percentage of their population. This has long been the case. Now under the draconian Internal Security Act passed in 2007 the Army and Police can stop and do search and seizure of anyone they choose for any reason, with few legal obligations that would protect the rights of the Akha. The Akha are thus prevented from travel, for health or education or employment. Extortion, land seizures, forced relocations and extra-judicial killings continue.

3. Our final concern, can be best illustrated by what has happened this last year in Haiti. American missionaries were caught trying to transport children, who they claimed were orphans, to an orphanage they were setting up. However none of the children turned out to be truly orphans. They ended up in jail for doing this, as they should have. The deception they used fits the UN definition for trafficking. While the world was alarmed at what was done, the fact is that missionaries remove thousands of Akha children from their families in Thailand. The removal of Akha children is done under this same deception, and while the international press fails to comment on it, the Thai government also fails to do anything about it. This is human trafficking and it has been going on for decades, used as a means of generating money from donors who think they are supporting an orphan, when they are only making the missions wealthy and are helping break up families. Sex abuse of these children continues to be a problem as it was in the residential schools of Canada. Right as we speak, thousands of Akha children are in mission residential schools in Chiangrai and Chiangmai province.

We ask the Forum to help us defend and protect the rights of the Akha people by urging the Thai government to defend these rights and by seeing greater investigation into the removal of Akha children from their families.

Thank you, Chairperson