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**5th Permanent Forum On Indigenous Issues
New York May 2006**

The Akha Heritage Foundation

Madam Chairperson:

This is Michu Wurh Zurh (Uaiyue) of the Akha people from Thailand, who has brought her four children to this forum. My name is Matthew McDaniel, and we are from the Akha Heritage Foundation.

In discussion of the MDG's we would like to point out a number of critical issues that the Akha people face.

Development can not occur without strong villages and strong families.
Development can not occur without land rights.

Of greatest concern to the Akha people is the loss of their rice farming lands. These lands are being taken by the Thai government, especially in the case of Hooh Yoh Akha.

There needs to be a mechanism by which the Akha can protect their farm lands. This includes the mandate of the UN in protecting the right to food.

But increasingly the UN agencies themselves are responsible for supporting programs that are ill conceived which cause dramatic poverty and death of the Akha.

To this list we would add UNDP which has supported a ban on shifting agriculture.

UNODC which has supported eradication projects while not supplying alternative forms of income.

UNESCO which has pushed eco tourism projects on communities that do not even have health care.

UNICEF which has failed to investigate the abuse of Akha children by missions in Thailand.

We are told by representatives of UNICEF that there is NOT a means of agency accountability apart from going to the special rapporteur. This is NOT correct. Each UN agency working with the indigenous must have a chain of command and a means by which the Akha and other peoples can file complaints about policies and projects which adversely affect them, as well as staff who may be specifically blocking their indigenous concerns due to a difference in race.

Thank you

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