

Fourth Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2005

Education :

Thank you Chairwoman

My name is Matthew McDaniel; The Akha Heritage Foundation

I am here on behalf of the Akha of Thailand who were denied visas by the US State Department.

It is crucial that the Permanent Forum recognize the role of missionaries in the destruction of indigenous knowledge systems and the domination of all forms of replacement education.

We point to the case of the Mlabri in Thailand, a small tribe entirely dominated by a Western mission. What hope of a truly free indigenous education do these people have? The case of the Akha no different.

We must have security in order to accomplish educational goals. However, we see infrastructure going into indigenous areas, but the indigenous increasingly lose their lands and are exploited.

In Thailand, which does not recognize the Akha, let alone give them all ID cards, how will educational goals include the Akha in the process?

Thailand has little to no recognition of indigenous rights. The traditional Akha must be included in the educational decision making process.

However, without addressing the situation of missions what possible role will indigenous knowledge in education play, when culture and indigenous knowledge have been eradicated?

The UN must step in to place a moratorium on the western colonial missions' subjugation and redefinition of indigenous culture and history.

Education by definition must include the education of children by parents in the jungle and farming practices during the daytime. Current models default to the Western view of education as something that must be controlled by the state in a schoolhouse.

The mandate on education must remain a voluntary choice for indigenous peoples. However, in Thailand, primary education in a schoolhouse is already mandatory, removing children from the integrated education process in the village.

So the question becomes – who's definition of education?

Funding must be made accessible to multiple traditional Akha NGOs. There is no way that indigenous knowledge educational goals can be implemented without sufficient funding.

The model we currently see is the recognition of some NGOs by the UN process, while these NGOs push for the exclusion of other NGOs and various views. Implementation can only be democratic when all views are welcome to the discussion.

Finally, we believe that the issue of education can not be adequately discussed or implemented without the discussion of the scourge of the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation as occurs rampantly in Thailand. We call for a special event on the issue of trafficking.

And we are very concerned about events, such as in Darfur, Sudan, and their implications for stable educational systems. A second Rwanda unfolds before our eyes, something we were told must never happen again.

Thank you Chairwoman.