

Keynote Speech
by H. E. Mr. Anand Panyarachun
UNICEF Ambassador for Thailand
at the Regional Consultation on
“Challenging the New Millennium:
The Rights of the Child and Issues of
Displacement in Southeast Asia”
Siam City Hotel
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In my capacity as the UNICEF Ambassador for Thailand, I would like to extend our warmest welcome to the delegations from countries in our Southeast Asian Region, our friends from South Asia who share some of the same problems and concerns, and others from Asia. I am pleased to see the trend that we are increasingly thinking of us as one Asian group.

I would also like to extend our congratulations to the National Youth Bureau, the organizer of this regional consultation, for taking the initiative in bringing together all of us. I am aware that the National Youth Bureau, together with UNICEF is monitoring the status of Thai children and initiates follow-up action to take remedial measures.

It is important to have opportunities for concerned Government agencies, NGOs and particularly youth, our stakeholders, from the two Asian regions, as well as UN agencies to have dialogues on important issues such as the one we are focussing on today.

I recall in an earlier occasion, over two years ago, I had the opportunity to appear before some of you who are from the Mekong Sub-Region, addressing the gathering of concerned Government and NGOs representatives on the “Illegal Labour Movements: the Case of Trafficking in Women and Children”.

It is encouraging to know that actions taken to tackle the problem of trafficked children, who are categorized as displaced children, are being reported here at this meeting and in a wider context of child rights and displacement in Southeast Asia. The persistence in combating the violations of the rights of displaced and trafficked children and sustenance of the interest and efforts in promoting Child Rights by all of you is highly commendable.

The expanded scope of deliberations of this meeting in the agenda - seems ambitious. I hope it will help us understand better the situation of refugee children, displaced and cross-border trafficked children and to come up with ways and cooperation in recommending solutions to the problems at all levels. In view of the apparent complexity and difficulties concerning the situation of such children in the

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Region, this is a very timely consultation.

For example, in September last year, **UNICEF** reported that as many as 500,000 people were displaced from their homes and facing severe nutritional and health risks in Timor. Among this number, some 75,000 were estimated to be under the age of five. Thailand, on the other hand, has been both the sending and receiving country as far as trafficking of children is concerned in this region.

Several reports have shown the rising number of children victims of trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation from our neighbouring countries, particularly in the Mekong Sub-region, and most notably from Myanmar, China, Laos, and Cambodia.

Also in Thailand, there are some 150,000 children from the hill tribes born in the country and categorized as children without nationality and often even birth registration. So are a number of sea gypsies along the Southern coast. This includes illegal foreign child workers who are working in deep sea fishing in Pattani province.

What can we do about such children is a question that needs to be answered, taking into account multiple dimensions such as human and child rights, humanitarian concerns, political issues, legal and constitutional provisions, economic and social implications etc. Efforts are being made by all of you to find long-term solutions to these problems. One country cannot do it alone as they are inter-related and emerging from the multiplicity of root causes. It calls for all of us to share among us the issues of concern and to seek ways to tackle them together. This calls for not only national, but bilateral and regional agreements, directions and concrete plans of action to advance the progress.

In these efforts, it is important to ensure compliance to the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child to provide the best protection to these children.

I would like to thank all of you who have come from various corners of our region with the great intention to arrive at constructive and positive solutions toward the improvement in the protection of refugee and displaced children. I would also like to thank the UN agencies, namely, UNHCR and UNICEF and the Southeast Asia Foundation for Institutional and Legal Development or SEAFILD for their continuing interest in this subject and support to this regional consultation. I wish you all great success in this very important deliberation.

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