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PRESS RELEASE

Combating Trafficking and Child Labour in Northern Thailand: *A Showcase of Effective Models and New Initiatives*

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For immediate release:

BANGKOK (ILO NEWS): The International Labour Organization and the Royal Thai Government have launched a series of joint-efforts to tackle human trafficking and child labour, while endorsing a number of existing ILO-supported initiatives as recognized 'Good Practices'.

The launch took place during a stakeholder meeting 3 – 4 May, 2007 in Chiang Rai. The participants included representatives from 9 Northern provinces of Thailand, including the Governor of Chiang Rai, representatives from Chiang Mai and Phayao Provinces, senior officials from the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, as well as senior figures from the ILO and Thailand's counter trafficking movement.

The new initiatives include a technical assistance programme offered to Thai women returning home after enduring trafficking-related abuses abroad and a "time bound" technical assistance project to strengthen and integrate responses to tackling the related problem of child labour in Northern Thailand.

It has been recognized that many trafficked Thai women who manage to return home are in dire need of counseling and support to re-integrate into their own societies. Often extremely traumatized by their experiences, sometimes penniless as domestic workers or indebted, many are also worried about the stigma they may face upon their return – especially if they had been trafficked into forced or coerced prostitution. Their inability to reintegrate/reunite with their families can lead to further exploitation and even re-trafficking. This new 3 year "**Economic Social Empowerment of Returned Victims of Trafficking**" project is sponsored by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security and the Government of Japan.

While the number of Thai youngsters in situations of child labour has been declining during the last decade, many foreign/migrant children are now filling the 'gap' in demand for children in exploitative situations in the Kingdom (e.g. organized begging and street selling, children working in bars or karaoke establishments). An integrated 3 year project working directly with the children, with communities, and with the local Government agencies through the Ministry of Labour and others, will operate in Chiang Rai Province. This work is being supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, as part of its overall support to the ILO global initiatives to combat child labour worldwide under the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). The Japanese company AEON also provided some financial support to the work in Chiang Rai province.

No stranger to working in Northern Thailand, the ILO, through its **IPEC Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women**, has been supporting work in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Phayao Provinces since 2003. During this period, a series of successful trafficking prevention field projects have been undertaken and plans are now underway to replicate these 'good practices' in other parts of the country.

More>>



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The good practices, showcased at this event, are supported by the Mekong project but implemented entirely by, and through, work of the Thai authorities and NGOs. They include:

- An Eco-Tourism Home Stay project in Chiang Rai Province, where Hill Tribe families learn to earn money by welcoming Thai and foreign guests into their homes (Chiang Rai);
- A high school where children from areas prone to human trafficking and high rates of out-migration are taught skills to increase their 'employability' while learning ways to stay safe if migrating later as adults (Chiang Rai);
- Development of a multi-province computerized human trafficking database system to centralize knowledge about problem areas, examine the vulnerabilities of individuals to trafficking, and use this data as required to formulate effective responses
- An integrated cross-departmental (local and provincial level) Operating Centre in Phayao Province to address the needs relating to trafficking of children and women and developing mechanisms to respond to them (Phayao);
- Employers and Media as a central focus in prevention efforts (Chiang Mai)

**Summaries of all these good practices can be found on the project Website:
www.childtrafficking.net**

The Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women operates in a total of five Mekong countries including Thailand and is supported by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).

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