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Hilltribes rock Chiang Mai
In Honour of His Majesty the King:
Hilltribe Musicians Take to the Stage For Legal Status and Against HIV/AIDS, Human Trafficking, and Drug Abuse

On November 3rd, 2007, in honour of H.M. the King, the hills will rock once again as hilltribe musicians stage their second International Pop Concert to advocate for recognition of legal status and the prevention of HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, and drug abuse. The Ministry of the Prime Minister's Office, Khunying Dhipavadee Meksawan, will introduce the event.

The Concert will attract more than 20 popular hilltribe singers, from seven ethnic groups, who will lead the show with songs, entertainment and messages delivered in Karen, Hmong, Mien, Akha, Lisu, Tai Yai and Lahu languages.

A group of young Thais who participated in the Mekong Youth Forum on Human Trafficking this summer in Bangkok will also take part in the Chiang Mai event – reinforcing one of the Hilltribe Concert’s main messages – that vulnerable groups, including children, should have a voice in the prevention of trafficking and other matters that seriously affect their lives.

The show will take place at Kard Cherng Doi, and will be broadcast live by Radio Thailand Chiang Mai, which transmits across Thailand, southern China, Lao PDR, northern Viet Nam, Myanmar and parts of India (beginning at 7 pm). Thailand’s Channel 11 television station will also conduct a simultaneous live prime time telecast from 8.30pm onwards for viewers throughout the kingdom.

Three years ago, Thailand’s first International Hilltribe Pop Concert, organized by UNESCO and Radio Thailand Chiang Mai, shook the mountains around Chiang Mai with a crowd of 4,000 stomping, dancing, jumping and singing fans. “The first concert was a major success – both as entertainment and in bringing attention to the issues facing hilltribe people,” said Dr. David A. Feingold, head of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Trafficking and HIV/AIDS Project and one of the event’s co-organizers. “This year’s event is even bigger, and highlights the importance of legal identity in preventing human trafficking.”

This gathering of different cultures and languages reinforces UNESCO’s mandate to promote cultural diversity and protect indigenous and minority cultures. “Minority people are starved for information and entertainment in their own languages. This puts them at great risk,” says Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer, Director of the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok.
Thus, the concert presents a perfect opportunity to raise awareness on issues of citizenship, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and human trafficking among hilltribe populations in Thailand and the Greater Mekong Subregion. "The concert will capture the attention of young people, who aren’t easy to reach. And it will help educate lowland Thai people to think of the hilltribe people as citizens of the country and not simply a tourist attraction," says Feingold. Organized in honor of H.M. the King of Thailand’s 80th Birthday, the concert is an opportunity for highlanders to express their gratitude to King Bhumipol for his tireless work in improving the livelihood and welfare of mountain people.

Over 5,000 highland minorities and lowland people are expected to attend. Admission is free, but requires a ticket, which can be obtained from Radio Thailand Chiang Mai. The concert will coincide with an exhibition to honor His Majesty King Bhumipol, and the Chiang Mai Food Festival.

The event is presented as part of the continuing cooperation between UNESCO and The Government Public Relations Office Region 3, Chiang Mai. Additional support comes from the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Thai Ministry of Culture, Plan International Thailand, Southeast Asia Regional Cooperation in Human Development (SEARCH), the International Labour Organization (ILO) Mekong Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), British Embassy Bangkok, the UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

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