THAILAND

Thailand, UNESCO prize for princess Sirindhorn

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The recognition has been bestowed on her for the project to restore the canal of Ampawa. The area, 72 kilometers south of Bangkok, is renowned for its agricultural tourism, and its more than 300 canals. The commitment of the royal family to protect the environment and natural resources.

Bangkok (AsiaNews) - UNESCO - the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - has honored Thai princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn with the Asia-Pacific Award 2008, for the preservation of a cultural landmark. The recognition has been awarded to her for her extensive efforts in the project Ampawa Chaipattananurak, dedicated to the preservation of the canal in Ampawa, located in the central province of Samutsongkram. The princess, the third born of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit, presided over the official inauguration.

The province of Samutsongkram, 72 kilometers south of Bangkok, covers 416 square kilometers, and is renowned for its agricultural tourism (coconut trees, palms, lychee), and the more than 300 natural canals that cross the city. The canal of Ampawa has been put under a careful plan of development, thanks in part to the support demonstrated by the king in person.

In order to protect the natural heritage of Thailand, and to support its civilian population, the king has also set up the Chaipattana foundation. The initiatives supported by the foundation include Ampawa Chaipattananurak, which literally means "triumphing through development (Chaipattana) and conservation (Nurak)." It is intended to preserve the traditional Thai-style wooden houses scattered along the route traced out by the canal, returning them to their original structure and at the same time guaranteeing protection of the environment.

The Chaipattana foundation was registered as a legal organization with the ministry of internal affairs on June 14, 1998. Its activity is focused on projects of development and restoration independent of the government, the bureaucracy of which threatens to bog down many initiatives. In the past, the foundation has guaranteed shelter for refugees or inhabitants of the countryside, and has started programs of professional training in order to prepare people for the workplace.