Poverty caught on canvas

Painting competition raises awareness of the destitute

Tears flowing down a farmer’s cheek vividly captured the plight of the poor in a poignant painting by 12-year-old Panthep Sriwongkaew.

Above this image, Panthep had added an image of two joining hands - one with scratches, stitches and bandages, and the other with a watch and clean clothes. On top, the boy had painted a picture of smiling Thais in different postures.

“Poverty is being poor,” said Panthep, a Prathom 6 (Grade 6) student, at Salakoo School in Bangkok.

“The poor are those who don’t have rice to eat, have no way out, no school to attend, no job to do, no money to invest, no shelter to live in, and they get no support from their family,” he said.

Panthep sent his drawing to a drawing and essay competition organised to mark International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, an event held annually on October 17. Panthep received a consolation prize award for his effort.

The theme of the competition was “Joining hands and hearts in the society to eradicate poverty”.

One hundred and twenty-four picture entries and 47 essays were submitted by 38 primary and lower-secondary schools under the affiliation of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, including those in dwelling communities in the city.

The aim of the yearly contest is to bring future generations closer to the issue of poverty and make them more aware of the issue so that they can voice their concerns.

The theme of this year’s International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, which coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is “Children and families speak out against poverty”.

“People these days usually look for ways to increase their savings. They look for opportunities to take more for themselves, but they don’t realise that the more [money] they take, the less [heart] they have,” said Asst Prof Jitti Mongkolnchaiarunya, dean of Thammasat University’s Faculty of Social Administration. “The proper way of thinking needs to be planted and nurtured among the new green shoots. [We] hope that the pictures these children draw and the essays they compose will inspire them to explore these issues more deeply,” he said.

In both the drawing and essay categories, cash awards and plaques were presented to the top three winners.

Fifteen-year-old Puntarika Hunsakunatai said she learned more about poverty in Thailand and the world at large from the research done for her essay.

“People are poor because they don’t have education. If they don’t receive a chance to study, they won’t have knowledge and skills to do their jobs, earn a living and live a proper life,” said Puntarika, a Mathayom Prachaniwet School student.


There are still some 75 million children worldwide, half of whom are girls, currently out-of-school.

In developing countries, the mental development of one-in-three children of primary school age has been impaired by malnutrition. “Poverty will not be solved by giving money to the poor, but giving them education will help,” said Puntarika.

“Money may be used up, but knowledge will not. "The prime minister certainly should take more responsibility for the poor,” Puntarika added.

At a time of multiple global crises, those that are hurt first - and worst - are the poor. According to estimates by the United Nations, the global economic crisis has claimed at least 50 million jobs this year. As many as 100 million more people are expected to fall below the poverty line in 2009.

The competition to mark International Day for the Eradication of Poverty was jointly organised by Unesco Bangkok, the United Nations Millennium Campaign, Thammasat University, the Friends of ATD (Aide a Toute De’tresse) Foundation, and International Movement ATD Fourth World.

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