



Plan & Thammasat University team up to address the plight of stateless children

BANGKOK, March 20, 2012 – Global child-rights organisation Plan International and prestigious Thammasat University's Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication jointly launched a public campaign on Tuesday to address the plight of hundreds of thousands of Thailand's stateless children who have been deprived of basic human rights such as education or healthcare.

The collaboration, which involves a seminar and a short-film contest by university students, aims to raise awareness among the general public, the news media and the soon-to-be journalists and media professionals on the issue of statelessness – its causes, its impact on the people themselves and on the country as a whole, and possible solutions to the problem.

"We at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication strive to prepare our students for responsible and ethical reporting of stories about children. Collaboration between Plan and Thammasat helps us achieve our goals, said Associate Professor Pornthip Sampattavanija, Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Kicking off the campaign on March 20th, which also marks Plan's 75th birthday, a panel of experts working with stateless people shared their thoughts, experiences and challenges at the seminar held at the Rangsit campus. Children who don't have Thai nationality and those who recently obtained one with the help of Plan also discussed the economic, social and legal difficulties they have faced as being stateless. An award-winning short film produced by stateless children was also shown.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), statelessness occurs for a variety of reasons, including discrimination against minority groups in nationality legislation, failure to include all residents in the body of citizens when a state becomes independent and conflicts of laws between states.

Statelessness is a massive problem that affects an estimated 12 million people worldwide, says the UNHCR. Non-government and government agencies estimate there are more than 1 million stateless people in Thailand – 65,000 of which are in Chiang Rai's Mae Fah Luang District.

Plan, which works in 50 developing nations across Asia, Africa and the Americas to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty, believes giving every child a birth certificate is an effective measure to prevent the statelessness.

“We take it for granted that every child celebrates their birthday yet millions of children in the developing world can’t because their births are not registered. Many of these children don’t even know how old they are because they don’t have a birth certificate,” Plan Asia Regional Director Mark Pierce said.

Every year, approximately 51 million children – two thirds of them born in Asia – are denied the basic right of a birth certificate. Without this vital piece of documentation, children have no formal identity, they don’t officially exist and are denied basic rights. Accessing medical treatment, enrolling at school, inheriting property, finding a job and staying secure from exploitation all rely on birth registration.

“Here in Asia, Plan’s goal is to reduce the barriers to the registration of every child and to ensure that every child born is registered,” Pierce said.

Plan first started campaigning for universal birth registration in Asia in 1998, then widened the campaign across the globe in 2005. Since then, Plan has facilitated the registration of more than 40 million people in 32 countries around the world – nearly two-thirds of them in Asia.

The collaboration between Plan and Thammasat’s Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication will not end after the 75th birthday celebration. Plan Thailand staff and Thammasat faculty members will continue to engage journalism students and short film contestants on the understanding of the statelessness issue for the right content of the movie production. The best film will be awarded at Plan’s launch of its Because I Am A Girl campaign in October.

“I hope this Plan-Thammasat cooperation will raise awareness among other sectors in society, so that we can all work together to restore the rights of these stateless children,” Associate Professor Pornthip said.

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