



WASHINGTON, September 20, 2011—Thailand is notorious for modern day slavery, including child prostitution, sex trade, and labor exploitation. International attention on the human trade in Thailand has raised awareness and advocacy by non-profit groups seeking to end the practice. In response, the Thai government has stepped-up anti-trafficking regulations and assistance programs for victims, but many marginalized groups in Thailand remain susceptible to the human trafficking trade.

Stateless people from the hill tribes, for example, are often vulnerable to human trafficking, according to Matt Lehmann, the public relations manager at Development and Education Program for Daughters and Communities Centre (DEPDC/GMS) in the Greater Mekong Sub-region

In Thailand, hundreds of thousands of members of minority ethnic groups legally have no national affiliation to Thailand. The Thai government officially recognizes only nine of the tribes in the remote highlands, leaving the rest without Thai citizenship. Because they have no legal national affiliation to Thailand, these groups have no right to education, employment, healthcare, or even freedom of movement.

Although stateless people have a right to attain citizenship under Thai law, the process is extremely difficult. Thai law states that eligible applicants can obtain citizenship within 90 days, but in reality, the process often takes as long as three years or more. Additionally, in many cases, government officials are reluctant to help stateless people proceed with the application

process due to corruption, which further slows the process.

Lehmann says lack of citizenship makes stateless people vulnerable to human trafficking in several ways.

Because they have little access to employment and education, stateless people are often mired in poverty, surviving through subsistence farming. Parents in these rural hillside villages sometimes send children away to escape this poverty, in hopes they will have more job opportunities in cities. However, instead of finding legitimate jobs, children often become exploited in the sex trade.

Other stateless people try to open business to support their families. Because they lack citizenship status, stateless people neither have rights to property nor access to borrow money from a legitimate financial institution. As a result, stateless people are often forced to obtain business loans from loan sharks. If, as it is often the case, they are unable to repay the debt to the loan shark, they are forced to sell their children to cancel the debt.

DEPDC/GMC works with stateless and other ethnic minorities to ward against falling into all kinds of human trafficking including domestic servitude and labor exploitation on fishing boat. Daughters Education Programme (DEP) provides “full-time accommodation, education and counseling services to young girls,” and the Half Day School program provides general education, clothing, and food to the children of stateless people. DEPDC also supports the Mekong Regional Indigenous Child Rights Home (MRICRH) shelter and 24 hour hotlines are available for aftercare services.

Lehmann laments that lack of funding hampers DEPDC/GMC's work. Though it costs less than \$6 a day for a child to receive education and other services, many agencies turned their supports towards other less developed countries since the economic crisis hit the global market. Lehmann also says that Thailand's economic prosperity masks the need for funding for trafficking victims in Thailand. Many donor agencies wrongly assume that the Thai government is readily funding trafficking assistance programs throughout the country.

Thailand's unequal income distribution means that prosperity does not reach marginalized groups, including stateless people. Marginalized groups in Thailand are as poor as those in

other less developed countries.

As Thailand struggles to grow as a democratic country, it must address the human rights conditions of all of its people. In a well structured democracy, everyone has equal rights regardless of their economic status or racial backgrounds. Unless Thailand recognizes the inalienable rights of stateless people as human beings, the country will neither grow as a democratic country nor will it successfully combat human trafficking.

For more information, visit www.depdcblog.wordpress.com

Youngbee Dale is a freelance writer, researcher, and human rights advocate. You can reach her at ybdale@gmail.com or follow her on Twitter [@ybdale](https://twitter.com/ybdale) .

From:

<http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/rights-so-divine/2011/sep/19/thailands-unfinished-battle-against-human-traffick/>