



**Commission on Narcotic Drugs:
Intersessional meeting of the Commission including Thematic Discussions**

“Responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and not in conformity with applicable international human rights obligations pose a challenge to the implementation of joint commitments based on the principle of common and shared responsibility”

22 September 2022

Distinguish guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Dispanadda Diskul, Chief Executive Officer of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation. I am very honoured to be here today to speak at the CND Thematic discussion on human rights obligations and to be able to share with you the work of the foundation. Our work is based on the experience of implementing our programs on the ground, where we encounter local issues regarding drug production, trafficking and selling. Some of it can be traced and linked to the issue of human rights such as stigmatisation, discrimination, limited access to resources and basic needs, and in some cases extrajudicial killing.

I want to start off by mentioning our flagship project, the Doi Tung Development Project, based in the northern part of Thailand which we start implementing our programme in 1988. We inherited a lot of multi-dimensional problems and issues such as the presence of militia groups, human and arms trafficking, addiction and health problems, lack of basic structure, environmental degradation, and lack of citizenship. We recognise that the root cause of the problem is lack of opportunity and poverty. Therefore, our approach is to address these two main issues. We begin a journey down the path of long-term and sustainable development.

We identify that the problem was only the symptoms and we need to tackle the vicious cycle of poverty, sickness and ignorance. We did that by believing in human potential. We listen to their needs; we involve them in the design and implementation and evaluation of programs. We help them to be able to help themselves and we see our role as a facilitator of changes. We need to build sustainability to capacity building and interaction with the community. We can see that alternative development is not just about the reduction or elimination of drugs but also about improving the quality of life and livelihoods of the people.

We use business as the main tool for change to provide people with better opportunities and give them the chance to live their lives more equally. The profit of our operation contributes to social, economic and environmental aspects. We are able to increase the income for people 17 folds and also provide more social support which now we are focusing on education including scholarships and formal and informal training programs for people within the community. Environmentally, we were able to revive the forest from 28% in 1992 to over 86%. The entire project area is now covered in greeneries in 2021. Through our alternative development programme, we are able to address a lot of human rights issues by designing our programs to incorporate a human rights agenda.



Some examples of the basic indicators from our project. We focus on gender equality. We have 1,350 employees and 53% of them are female and 47% are male. We can see that over half the management positions are females. For the local employment rate, about 77% of our employees are locally hired.

One of the main issues that we think is the salient point when you talk about human rights issues in relation to drugs is social stigmatisation. In Doi Tung, we run a programme called “Volunteer to do good”. It is the platform for people with problems of drug additions to come and get help on a voluntary basis. We work with them, and government officials, providing needed health care. We also provide basic skill training. We work with communities and their leaders to welcome them back after they have graduated from the program and this helped differently to reduce stigmatisation. Equally important is to provide these graduates with meaningful jobs. Training programmes that you provided for them then go towards employment opportunities locally. We employ a lot of people who join our programme. The relapse rate in Doi Tung was 13% and for our new project next door to Doi Tung, the relapse rate is about 20%.

In conclusion, when you talk about development and issues in relation to human rights, it is important to look at it from the people-centric approach. It's important to create conditions where the community can thrive. The development programme is simply a tool to nudge the people towards a better path and the human rights agenda must be built into the program implementation and its KPI must also be reflected. We asked often ask ourselves a very simple question, what do the people get from the money we spent? It needs to be proven economically, socially and environmentally.

I do hope that with the limited time I have, I can share with you some of the issues the Foundation has done. I would like to express that the Mae Fah Luang Foundation and Thailand stand ready to share our experiences with you all.

I thank you.