

**It started in 2004.** Children spoke and people listened..

**Now, in 2007,** their voices are gaining strength...their message is clearer



*Their* Voices.

*Their* Views.

Are *You* Listening?

**We are.**

**W**hile Governments of the Greater Mekong Sub-region continue to develop their multilateral commitments to fight human trafficking, three organizations are committed to assist in that process by bringing a fresh perspective to the fore – the voices and views of some of those most vulnerable to trafficking – children and young people.

**The 2007 Mekong Youth Forum on Human Trafficking** is a joint initiative of the ILO Mekong Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women, Save the Children UK's Cross-Border Project to Fight Trafficking and World Vision International. The Forum brings together young people from across the GMS to discuss and recommend ways to better prevent the labour and sexual abuses associated with trafficking.

A fourth partner, the UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP), helps to facilitate dialogue between the young delegates and their Governments.

### **Why Listen to Children and Youth?**

Children and youth have a perspective too – often a unique view – on ways to prevent the abuses caused by human trafficking in the GMS. Those voices should be heard and those views considered when developing public, bilateral and multilateral policy to combat trafficking. Indeed, both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Convention 182 on eliminating the worst forms of child labour call for direct consultation of children in policy matters affecting their own well-being.

This year, from Bangkok to Hanoi, from Vientiane to Phnom Penh and from Kunming, Yangon and Beijing back to Bangkok once again – hundreds of children have gathered at national forums to express their views about how to prevent human trafficking within their own countries. **The ILO, Save the Children UK, World Vision International and UNIAP** are committed to ensuring their voices will be heard by those in a position to take action.

### **The Sub-regional Forum:**

From 2 – 9 September 2007 a total of 30 young participants chosen by their peers at the national forums will have traveled to Bangkok to review sub-regional efforts to fight trafficking and meet with senior policy makers from their respective countries. They are not issuing demands, making presentations or speeches – but are discussing openly and constructively ways that all members of society – especially those most vulnerable to trafficking – can participate in the fight to eradicate trafficking and the sexual and labour exploitation that result.

### **Background:**

The ILO's Mekong Project to Trafficking in Children and Women and Save the Children's Cross Border Anti-Trafficking Project launched their "Voices of Children" partnership in 2003. The initiative was a response to the absence of children's participation in regional policy discussions on human trafficking, brings to the fore the views and experiences of children who had been trafficked or were at risk of human trafficking.

The Mekong Children's Forum on Trafficking in October, 2004 provided a venue for children's views, and actively recognized the importance of children's contribution to the development of policies and programs against the trafficking of children. A series of national advocacy events preceded the Forum, in Cambodia, China (Yunnan and Guaxi provinces), Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. A Forum was also conducted in Myanmar.

The 2004 Children's Forum and the activities that led up to it were designed to work together with the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT), a sub-regional government process involving all 6 GMS countries, which was established to develop and implement coordinated and comprehensive government policies and program interventions to end human trafficking. The COMMIT process is being supported by the United Nations system through a number of UN organizations including the UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP), which is the Secretariat to the COMMIT.

In 2007 World Vision International entered the partnership as a full supporting agency and UNIAP continued to offer its technical and advocacy support.

### **Objectives of the 2007 Mekong Youth Forum:**

1. To provide a venue for children and young people in the Mekong sub-region to

collectively articulate their perspectives on the issue of trafficking and share their experiences in participating in anti-trafficking action

2. To facilitate a process for children to contribute to the design of policies and programs addressing trafficking at the sub-regional level
3. To demonstrate the value of participatory approaches in the search for sustainable solutions to the problem of trafficking

### **Outputs:**

1. An agenda for action, a set of six thematic recommendations, clearly defined and developed by youth, reflecting their priorities for action to end human trafficking in the sub-region
2. Documentation of children's perspectives and experiences related to human trafficking; the further development of operational guidelines for adults, facilitators and trainers on child participation

### **Specifically these six recommendations should cover:**

- Participation of young people and accountability to young people by policy makers
- Victim protection
- Education (access to quality education, and as an alternative to pre-mature migration and child labour)
- Mainstreaming of prevention methods at community and family level that are supported by governments but are community-driven
- Nationality/Citizenship
- Migration

The Youth Agenda for Action and the documentation of their perspectives and experiences will serve as key advocacy material to be shared with other forums, gatherings, and organizations that aim to end human trafficking.

Their agenda for action will become a key reference for ILO-IPEC, Save the Children UK and World Vision International in refining their programs regarding children and youth in the sub-region. It will also be used as a guide for advocacy, capacity building, and developing partnerships with children.

ILO-IPEC, Save the Children UK and World Vision, at national and regional levels, will support the implementation of priority mechanisms and actions that the children might decide to explore, and implement.

### **Process:**

At the **country** level, partners have

Initiated a process of capacity building for children's and youth's participation

In collaboration with other international and national partners, forums for sharing young people's views and experiences on human trafficking as well as other worst forms of child exploitation were organized in all 6 GMS countries by the various partner agencies. Children who participate in ongoing anti-trafficking programs targeted at risk, or formerly trafficked children prepared advocacy statements that summarized their exposures and experiences on human trafficking; their analysis of its causes and consequences; their recommendations and calls for action to government and civil society at large. These forums provide the platform for dialogues at the national and sub-regional levels with senior officials who are actively engaged with the COMMIT process.

At the **sub-regional** level, the partners:

Organized the Mekong Youth Forum on Human Trafficking as the culminating joint advocacy event planned for 2 – 9 September 2007. The conference brings together child and youth representatives from 6 countries, selected in open and transparent processes at the national level, to commonly define an action plan reflecting the children's priorities and recommendations on anti-trafficking policies, programs and activities – and to bring those to Bangkok to share with the sub-regional group.

Document children's perspectives and experiences related to human trafficking with a joint publication and audio-visual documentation that presents:

The process of the Mekong Youth Forum, capturing the children's and youth's perspectives and experiences on trafficking;

Organizational guidelines on the use of participatory methodologies

### **Linkage to the COMMIT Process:**

The Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) process would provide an excellent channel through which the young people could exercise their rights to participation and actively influence the development of national and sub-regional anti-trafficking policies.

By actively engaging the Governments of the COMMIT process in the Forum at the national and sub-regional levels, the UNIAP, ILO-IPEC, Save the Children UK and World Vision International, hope that they will recognise the value of youth participation as it relates to anti-trafficking action.

## Timetable of Key Events:

Date	Location
27-31 March 2007	Thailand Children's Forum: Bangkok
26-27 April 2007	Cambodia Children's Forum: Phnom Penh
5-8 June 2007	Lao PDR Children's Forum: Vientiane, Lao PDR
26-28 July 2007	China Children's Forum: Beijing
4-6 August 2007	Vietnam Children's Forum: Hanoi
18-20 August 2007	Myanmar Children's Forum:
28 August 2007	Briefing to Mekong partner organizations, Bangkok
2-9 September 2007	Mekong Youth Forum: Bangkok
13 December 2007	Presentation of Youth Recommendations at COMMIT Senior Officials Meeting (SOM5) in Beijing

For further information, please visit the Forum Website:

[www.mekongyouthforum.com](http://www.mekongyouthforum.com)