



Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations

The Only Multi-Racial Worldwide Indigenous Confederacy In Existence

A BEAUTIFUL CONCEPT FOR HOW INDIGENOUS CHILDREN SHOULD BE EDUCATED

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I met Mrs. Suraporn Suriyamonton of the 4 million person Karen Tribal Nation of Burma/Thailand, at the Tribal Link Project Access Global Capacity Training for Indigenous Peoples Training course; held in May 2012 in New York City USA.

Ever since I became aware in my early teens of the genocide being waged against the Karen Tribe by the government of Burma - I have longed to befriend a Karen person who could help me to find a way to support their liberation struggle, which incidentally - is the longest in modern history having lasted for over 60 years!

Suraporn was able to put me into contact with key leaders - even though she is from Thailand, and just for the record - the Thai Government treats the Karen People far better than the ignoble and oppressive regime that persecutes the Karen in Burma.

Now what I can do for Suraporn is to tell you a little about her and her life's dedication. Suraporn serves as a board member of the Indigenous People's Foundation for Education and Environment, an organization that has a goal of increasing indigenous participation internationally.

She is actively involved with the Women's Empowerment movement, which works with indigenous women at the Community level. She is also a member of the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation (PCF) in partnership with two indigenous organizations (Inter-Mountain Peoples Education and Cultures in Thailand Association (IMPECT), and Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples Network Foundation (IKAP) and two NGOS: Foundation for Applied Linguistics, and The Life Skills Development Foundation.

Suraporn is a very kind, motherly and soft-spoken lady; and the two issues nearest and dearest to her heart are improving education for indigenous children - and the recognition of shifting cultivation as sustainably practiced by indigenous peoples...as a valid traditional agricultural practice.

The two topics may not appear to be intrinsically linked at first glance, but they most certainly are; for a malnourished child cannot reap any benefits from even the soundest education that the world can offer it. In Thailand, though far better for indigenous peoples than Burma; problems often arise that negatively impact on the ability of indigenous peoples to feed their families - using traditional farming practices. This is mainly because these practices (with shifting cultivation being Chief among them) are not officially recognized by sectors in the Thai government that take responsibility for Agriculture, Lands and the Environment...and consequently, indigenous farmers may run-afoul of local laws and be evicted - or have their crop fields destroyed. Thus subjecting them to a food 'insecurity' crisis.

On the other of the two main issues I mentioned, Suraporn has a very beautiful concept for how indigenous children should be educated, and I would like to spend the remainder of this article trying my best to briefly convey it to you.

Firstly, indigenous children should only be educated in the tribal languages which they speak - for the first few years of their formal education experience, it is hard enough to understand mathematics (for example) on it's own; without having to learn it from a teacher who is speaking to you in a foreign language - which you are ALSO struggling to learn and understand at the same time.

*NB * The reader should note here that this actually IS a right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - that was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 17th September 2007; see specifically Articles 14 & 15.*

Suraporn says the classrooms should be staffed with indigenous teachers who would speak the language - and understand the cultures of the students in their care, thereby eliminating the kinds of discrimination and cultural contempt that most non-indigenous teachers exhibit due to their own ignorance of their indigenous wards distinct cultural identities and mannerisms.

Also, the classrooms would feel to be a 'less emotionally sterile' of an environment - and be more conducive to learning by indigenous children. For example, it would incorporate more visual stimulation that is of the natural world that is familiar to the indigenous children; and the teacher-student dynamic would be more family oriented...and not regimented and emotionally detached as the formal education system is in the Nation States. The Western style education model that works for non-indigenous urban youth, does NOT work for indigenous rural youth - who have an entirely different way of seeing and understanding the world around them; and a failure to recognize and respect this fact - is to forcibly impose an illegal assimilation agenda on indigenous children....in violation of International Laws and Conventions concerning indigenous peoples worldwide.

Suraporn was thankful to the Tribal Link Foundation that made it possible for her to attend the May 2012 training with 20 other indigenous colleagues from around the world (author included); which was held at the United Nations. The annual training course incorporated this year the "Convention on Biological diversity, and the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization"; as well as the customary introduction to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues - and how best to utilize this body to advance in the International Indigenous Rights arena.

World famous Indigenous Rights expert Mrs. Andrea Carmen of the Yaqui Tribal Nation - and senior staffer at the International Indian Treaty Council (ITC) presented again this year - as in all previous training courses, and as a 3rd time beneficiary of Mrs. Carmens easy to understand yet comprehensive training myself (2009, 2010, 2012) I can attest to the priceless value of having her as your educator, mentor; and friend.

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Damon is also the Founder/President of the Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations (www.pantribalconfederacy.com) & Barbados Representative of the United Confederation of Taino People (UCTP); and CARICOM Commissioner on the Indigenous Commission for Communications Technologies

in the Americas (ICCTA).

A registered participant in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), Member of the Indigenous Caucus of the Americas working group (since 2000) on the Draft Declaration of the Americas; and Sole Caribbean Representative on the planning committee of the 4th Indigenous Leaders Summit of the Americas (ILSA) – both at the Organization of American States (OAS).