

Laos marks indigenous people's day

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Laos joined nations around the world in marking the International Day of Indigenous People this month.

The actual day was held on August 9, but Laos celebrated the occasion on Friday by organising a workshop in Vientiane to honour indigenous people and recognise their efforts to maintain their distinctive cultures, socio-political systems and identities.

United Nations' Resident Coordinator, Dr Dongil Ahn,



Prof. Sayamang Vongsak.

said Laos had 49 recognised ethnic groups who lived all over the country, many in remote rural areas.

"Despite their rich cultures and identities many of them are part of the poorest and most vulnerable population," he said.

According to a Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release, the Lao Front for National Construction was established as a political organisation that aims to encourage solidarity among ethnic people while enhancing their rights and encouraging participation in national development.

In Laos, all ethnic groups are equal before the law. The constitution's Article 1 states

that: "Laos is a unified country belonging to all multi-ethnic people and is indivisible." Article 8 says the state pursues a policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups.

"All ethnic groups have the right to protect, preserve and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes," stated the press release.

"All acts creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are prohibited. The state implements every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the socio-economic level of all ethnic groups."

The event was organised by the Lao Front for National Construction, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UN Development Programme.

The United Nations adopted August 9 as International Day of Indigenous People in 1994 to further strengthen international cooperation in solving problems faced by indigenous people in areas such as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment, and social and economic development.

The Lao government voted for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007.

The Lao government has also clarified issues about the rights and freedoms of indigenous people, which were raised in a UN special report at the Third Committee of the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly in New York in 2007.

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