

# The Ride for Freedom

## 382 Days Across the US by Horseback

### For Akha Human Rights 2009-2010



#### **The Akha Hill Tribe**

The Akha live in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, China and Vietnam with a population of about 600,000 people. They are mountain farmers who are self sufficient.

#### **The Queen of Thailand takes their land**

In 2003 the Akha of Hooch Yoh Akha village in Ampur Mae Fahluang, Chiangrai Province, Thailand requested our assistance. The Queen of Thailand had set up a project taking all the farm land of Hooch Yoh Akha and four other villages, comprising more than 5,000 acres. This was the food security of more than 1200 Akha villagers. The Thai army, forestry and police enforced the land seizure, bringing in dogs and forbidding villagers from farming their normal rice fields, vegetable fields and fruit orchards. As a warning, 8 villagers were arrested and jailed for 30 days, two of whom were women who were 8 months pregnant. These villagers were fined 3 years wages for farming their own land. These lands were seized by the Queen's Royal Project, without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the Akha villagers themselves. The Akha received no compensation. The seizure is in violation of international law. In 2007 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food wrote a "Letter of Allegation" to the Thai government regarding this land seizure. Since 2003 the Queen has seized thousands of acres of additional land, spreading across the valley, taking land that belonged to the Akha more than 100 years, depriving them of their most basic right to food. All the land of Pah Nmm Akha in this same province was taken.

#### **Work them like slaves!**

Not enough to just take their land, the Queen needed slaves, so the villagers were allowed to stay, and then work like slaves, producing fruits and vegetables on land that belongs to them, for the Queen of Thailand. They must arrive at the fields no later than 7am and work till dark, seven days a week for approximately \$1.50 US dollars. If they arrive late after hiking two hours to the fields, they are denied work and pay for the day and must return home with nothing. Their small pay will not buy the food they grew on the land, their nutrition has been greatly reduced and the young people have lost hope for the future.

#### **Before the Queen:**

The Akha were growing rice, coffee, tea, ginger, sugar cane, red beans, black beans, garlic, soy beans, onions, bananas, bamboo roots, potatoes, squash, pumpkins, corn, cucumbers, sunflowers, peaches, avocados, mangos, spices, figs, chestnuts, sweet potatoes, peanuts, plums and many other crops as well as raising cattle, horses, pigs, chickens, geese, ducks, goats and water buffalo on these same lands, as they had been doing for more than a 100 years.

#### **What you can do:**

Contact the Thai Mission to the UN and ask that the Queen of Thailand give back the land of the Akha. The Thai monarchy is the richest in the world at wealth estimated over \$35 billion. So why does the Queen need to take the land of the poorest? Your help is needed to get the Thai Queen to give back the land of the Akha people. **Thai Mission Ph. 212-754-2230**

**The Akha Heritage Foundation**

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